

# **A Case Study of Youth Involvement in Irish Credit Unions**

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Submitted April 2014

A Major Research Essay submitted to Cape Breton University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Business Administration in Community Economic Development.

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## **Abstract**

Credit unions and co-operatives in Canada and many other countries struggle with how to attract and retain youth as members, staff, and elected leaders. Irish credit unions have been working to address this challenge for over 20 years at the national and local levels. This research was designed to find out what Irish credit unions are doing to involve youth and why.

This study examined what strategies and policies credit unions have in place to involve youth, what initiatives are working well, their challenges, barriers, and limitations, and why credit unions selected their current approaches. The study incorporated secondary data such as journal articles and reports, and built on the secondary data with primary data collected through eight structured and semi-structured interviews. The respondents included six Irish and two Canadian credit union representatives.

Respondents shared examples of initiatives that are working well, such as the Schools Quiz. They identified challenges like lack of technology and ability to compete with banks, and external factors like the economic downturn and resulting emigration. Respondents shared lessons from their experience that may be useful for other credit unions. Respondents mentioned the value of viewing involving youth as a long-term approach, with long-term benefits, and advantages that can be realized by sharing information and collaborating to achieve more than one can do alone.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful:

To Dr. Michael McNamara. Thank you for the support, understanding, and expertise, all of which you shared generously over the several years it took me to complete this project.

To Dr. Matt Hern and Susan McDonald, who provided much appreciated feedback and guidance.

To Kieran McDonnell, who was instrumental in helping me learn about the Irish credit union system and its youth involvement work.

To the participants in my research, who shared generously of their time, knowledge, and ideas. This study was made possible by their willingness to help me.

To my many classmates in Edmonton and Warman. I have learned much from each of you. To Wendy Featherstone and Fred Khonje, who assisted me throughout the program, Flo Frank and Stewart Perry, for their mentorship and support, the dancing babes, who put up with me while I was focusing on school, and my mom, for her support. Special thanks to JR, who helped inspire me to finish this project.

Financial assistance was provided in part by:

- Bank of Mom;
- Cape Breton University Scholarship;
- Dennis Lyster Leadership Bursary;
- Lemaire Co-operative Studies Award, Canadian Association for Studies in Co-operation; and
- Norm Bromberger Bursary.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

This is a case study of youth-engagement programs and policies in the credit union (CU) sector in Ireland. This study explores strategies and policies in Irish credit unions that are intended to encourage and support youth involvement in CUs. The question of how to engage young people in the co-operative movement has been a priority for the co-operative sector in Canada since the sector's leadership in developing the first co-operative youth education programs in the 1920s (Puchala and Heggie, 2009, p. *vii*). The need to attract, develop and retain young people into the co-operative sector will become increasingly more important to the survival of the sector as leaders and members age (Credit Union Central of Canada, 2006, p. 4). Therefore, this study is an opportunity to learn from the Irish experience, with the intention of making the learning from this study available to Canadian credit unions and co-operatives that are also confronting challenges with attracting and retaining youth.

This study presents data outlining the strategies, results, successes, and challenges of the approaches that have been taken. The study examines the reasons why Irish CUs have focused their strategy this way. The study notes programs and policies in place at the local and national levels. Additional factors impacting Irish credit unions' involvement of youth, such as availability of services and technology, and other possible constraints are also examined.

### **1.1 Problem Context**

Since the 1920s, co-operative leaders in Canada have recognized the need to recruit and educate young people about co-operatives, so that young people would

become the future members and leaders of co-operatives (Puchala and Heggie, 2009, p. *vii*).

Credit unions in Ireland and Canada have struggled to gain and retain youth involvement, and have developed different approaches for attracting the next generation. Through the decades, co-operatives have developed various initiatives to educate and recruit young people into the sector, ranging from education initiatives and marketing campaigns, to governance programs, and staff recruitment and retention initiatives. Despite these efforts, difficulty persists in attracting youth to credit unions and co-operatives.

As Irish credit unions faced the issue of lack of youth involvement, the Irish League of Credit Unions (ILCU) decided to take action. By 1999, the ILCU had appointed a Youth Policy Task Force to develop a comprehensive youth policy for Ireland (McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward, 2000, pp. 4, 6). By comparison, Credit Union Central of Canada released its first position paper on increasing youth involvement in 2006.

The researcher assumes that there were a couple of main reasons for Ireland's early attention to the need to increase youth involvement. One reason for Ireland's action is likely credit unions' difficulty in competing with banks that could more quickly adopt new technology, such as ATMs and bankcards, faster than the credit unions. Another reason that Irish CUs identified the need to increase youth involvement is likely that Irish CUs were feeling the effects of an aging population in advance of the impacts being felt at Canadian credit unions. Canadian CUs were leaders in new technology adoption, so the researcher assumes that young peoples' lessened involvement in credit unions is a more recent phenomenon here.



Despite identifying the need to involve young people more and the work done to date, Ireland's credit unions continue to face challenges in involving young people. When identifying internal constraints on development in a survey of credit union boards of directors for the 2012 Report on the Commission on Credit Unions, all types of credit unions identified concerns about attracting and retaining young members as more than "quite important", which was one of the highest rated internal constraints identified (Commission on Credit Unions, 2012, pp. 37, 38). Clearly Irish credit unions are still struggling to address this issue, even though a national policy was established over two decade ago. This study examines the current state of youth involvement in Irish credit unions, in order to better understand current practice, successes, and challenges.

## **1.2 Rationale**

The Irish credit union system is a focal point for this research in part because it is unique in that it has continued to take action to increase youth involvement for over 20 years and has implemented an array of successful programs and strategies at local and national levels. By comparison, while credit unions in many countries have implemented strategies or policies to increase youth involvement, these initiatives have either been short-term, more recently implemented, or focused only on one geographic level (i.e. national or local, not both). Ireland stands alone in its long-term, direct commitment to credit union-led youth initiatives. Ireland's initiatives also go beyond marketing programs and are designed to build a life-long knowledge and appreciation of CUs.

According to a number of recent studies, many co-operatives will be or already are facing a substantive exodus of baby boomer aged staff, management, and members (Credit Union Central of Canada, 2006, p. 4, McCarthy, Briscoe & Ward, 2000, p.2). As

baby boomers retire, co-operatives and credit unions will face a gap in human resource capacity and institutional knowledge. As this demographic lessens their activity level in the marketplace, co-operatives may struggle to maintain a sustainable volume of business if new, younger members are not attracted to credit unions. Maaniche's theory, frequently referred to by Harold Chapman and other leaders in the co-operative movement, has been noted as one reason to focus on involving the next generation in co-operatives and credit unions. The theory predicts that unless co-operatives educate adults and particularly youth, the life cycle of a co-op will be only a generation and a half (Jodi Crewe, 2001, p. 47). Combined with the findings of demographic researcher Robert D. Putnam, who assessed the connections between civic engagement and economic attainment (Putnam, 1995, pp. 65-66), the need to engage younger people in both civil society and the workplace becomes increasingly important for consideration by communities and co-operatives.

Credit unions in both Canada and Ireland have identified these trends regarding low levels of youth involvement and are now taking action to ensure that young people are educated about credit unions and opportunities for involvement. While both of these countries have begun to take action, there is little research on the outcomes of these programs. This study can begin to fill the gap in current research on this topic.

By examining the Irish credit unions' approach, Canadian credit unions may be able to gain new insights into effective ways to involve young people. This study is an opportunity to learn from the Irish experience, with the intention of making the learning from this study available to Canadian credit unions and co-operatives. Co-operative organizations focused on education, youth member recruitment, or staff attraction and

retention will be able to use this study as a resource to inform their own program planning into the future.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study and Objective**

The purpose of this study is to develop a case study of youth involvement in Irish credit unions, to better inform Canadian credit unions and co-operatives about what Irish credit unions are doing to involve youth and why they have chosen their approach.

The research question this study addresses is as follows:

***What are Irish credit unions doing to involve youth (up to age 30) as members, staff, and leaders in their co-operatives?***

To answer the research question, this study focuses on examining the following aspects of the Irish credit unions' policies and strategies related to youth involvement:

- What strategies and policies are in place?
  - What aspects of this approach are working well?
  - What are the challenges?
- Why this approach?
  - How did they arrive at this strategy?
  - What has changed and/or been learned from the initial strategy up to now?

### **1.4 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This study is not an exhaustive cataloguing of all credit union initiatives focused on young people. Rather, the study will utilize samples from national and local initiatives in Ireland. The study is not a comprehensive analysis of each program. It focuses on selected elements from the programs with the intention of understanding outcomes, successful approaches, and lessons learned from the Irish example. There are several

limitations to the findings. First, the study subjects are a small sample of specific policies and programming in one country, and therefore the approach taken by these credit unions may not be transferable or applicable elsewhere where the context is different and other factors are involved. Second, this study will identify, but not include an in-depth assessment of all possible factors related to recruitment successes and or failures, such as the effects of the world economic downturn on Ireland. However, the study will include factors unique to Ireland and Irish credit unions that may affect youth involvement initiatives. Third, it should not be taken for granted that successful strategies in one program area apply equally (or well) to other programming areas. So, while this study may help educate and inform program designers or policy makers, the models presented here and the lessons learned from each would need to be adapted to fit a local context.

### **1.5 Outline of Remainder of the Document**

Chapter Two focuses on a review of related literature. Literature focused on the Irish credit union system's youth involvement initiatives is analyzed. Literature that informs our understanding of the Irish credit union system and other community factors that may be impacting youth involvement is examined. Relevant literature from Canadian or other credit union and co-operative research is also reviewed, as well as selected materials encompassing theories of youth development, youth involvement, and civic engagement.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology and procedures used. This Chapter outlines why a qualitative case study approach is taken, and discusses the data collection methods used in collecting and analyzing the primary data, literature, and written materials used. An overview, the research methodology and design, selection of site and

participants in the study, data collection, processing and analysis procedures, methodological assumptions, limitations, credibility, and ethical considerations are detailed.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the research. The new knowledge developed through this study is presented within the main research focus areas, and the research question and sub questions. This Chapter outlines what Irish credit unions are doing to involve young people, including the strategies and policies in place and why they have selected this approach.

Chapter Five discusses implications of the approach taken by the Irish credit unions. A summary of the study is presented, along with the conclusions, and implications of the findings of the research. Implications for practice and further research, as well as recommendations are included.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

Credit unions (CUs) are a common feature of many communities in Canada, Ireland, and around the world. Understanding how credit unions involve youth and why they have adopted the approaches they utilize may help other co-operatives facing the same challenges of building involvement of the next generation. To better understand why credit unions are so interested in involving young people, what they are doing, and how that relates to broader theories of youth engagement, this Chapter examines a number of academic research papers, articles, and other materials. This Chapter also explores some of the additional factors that may be affecting Irish credit unions' ability to involve young people.

### **2.1 Credit Unions and Co-operatives**

To better understand the unique approach of credit unions, or financial co-operatives, literature examining the history, philosophy, and scale of co-operatives is presented. According to Gibson (2005), the first co-operatives appeared in the mid-1700s in France, and spread rapidly to other countries, with the Equitable Pioneers of Rochdale Society in 1844 being the first example of a successful “modern” co-operative. These modern co-operatives, classified as such by retaining the principles and successful approach started with Rochdale, have spread throughout the world. Since the time of the Rochdale Pioneers, co-operatives have identified the need to educate and recruit new members. Also, co-operatives have always incorporated social benefit into their philosophy. In part because of this commitment to social purpose, co-operatives have a long-standing interest in involving youth.

#### **2.1.1 Credit Unions and Co-operatives Defined**

A co-operative is “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically controlled enterprise” (International Co-operative Alliance, 2014). Co-operatives may be very different types of enterprises, and credit unions are financial co-operatives. Credit unions are defined as “member-owned, not-for-profit financial co-operatives” (World Council of Credit Unions, 2014). According to the International Co-operative Alliance, over one billion people are involved in co-operatives worldwide (International Co-operative Alliance, 2014). Co-operatives and credit unions not only share the same overall member-based structure, they also have a shared philosophy.

### **2.1.2 Co-operative Philosophy and Approach**

All co-operatives are formed around the same seven principles, two of which are most relevant to this research: Principle 5: Education, Training and Information; and Principle 7: Concern for Community (International Co-operative Alliance, 2014). Following these two principles in particular, co-operatives have demonstrated a long-standing interest and commitment to both involving and educating youth in co-operatives as members, elected leaders, and staff. Since the time of the Rochdale Pioneers, co-operatives have identified the need to educate and recruit new members, and a dual purpose of focusing on business while championing greater social good (Birchall and Ketilson, 2009; McMurtry, 2009; Handy, 2002; Fairbairn, 2000; Laidlaw, 1980). Recent research reiterates social responsibility as an integral part of [Irish] credit unions’ action (Power, O’Connor, McCarthy, and Ward, 2012, p. 11). Through youth involvement and education, credit unions demonstrate this interest in social goals and responsibilities.

In many countries, including Ireland and Canada, credit unions work together through national associations. In Canada, the association is called Credit Union Central of Canada (CUCC), while in Ireland, the organization is called the Irish League of Credit Unions (ILCU). These organizations offer several similar services, such as acting as a trade association, thereby creating opportunity for credit unions to network and learn from each other, while providing a national voice for advancing government relations issues, and giving central support services to credit unions (CUCC, 2014, ILCU, 2014).

### **2.1.3 Irish Credit Unions**

Irish CUs represent over 2.9 million members (Irish league of Credit Unions, 2014). In 2009, Irish credit union membership represented 66% of the population, the greatest proportion of credit union members in the population of any country in the world (McKillop and Quinn, 2012, p. 23). Of the more than 600 credit unions in Ireland (Power, O'Connor, McCarthy, and Ward, 2012, p. 10), the Irish League of Credit Unions represents over 500 (Irish league of Credit Unions, 2014). By comparison, as of November 2013, there were 332 Canadian credit unions affiliated with Credit Union Central of Canada, representing over 5.3 million members (Credit Union Central of Canada, 2013, pp. 2, 4), or about 33% of the population (Canadian Co-operative Association, 2014). As of 2012, the World Council of Credit Unions (WOCCU) reported that there were almost 56,000 credit unions in 101 countries, representing over 200 million members (WOCCU, 2014). Table 1 summarizes these statistics for credit unions.

Table 1

#### Credit Union Statistics

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<u>Location</u>	<u># of Credit Unions<sup>a</sup></u>	<u># of Members</u>	<u>Percentage of Population</u>
Ireland	500	2.9 million	66%
Canada	332	5.3 million	33%
Worldwide	56,000	200 million	2.8%

---

Note: <sup>a</sup> The number of credit unions statistics are based on the number of credit unions that are affiliated with the national credit union association in a given region.

Irish credit unions, as in most other countries, originally formed as a way to ensure that people who could not get loans from banks could still gain access to credit (Power, O'Connor, McCarthy, and Ward, 2012, p. 10). In Canada, the first credit union formed to help people gain access to credit at a fair interest rate (Manitoba's Credit Unions, 2014). Credit unions in both countries have built upon these services and have grown significantly in recent decades.

Credit unions in Ireland are noted as the most successful and largest co-operative sector in that country (Power et al., 2012, p. 10). Given that Irish credit unions have only been around since the 1950s (Power et al., 2012, p. 10), and the Irish League of Credit Unions since 1960 (Irish League of Credit Unions, 2014), this success can be seen as quite an accomplishment. Even so, Irish credit unions were classified by researchers led by McKillop in 2006 as less developed than their counterparts in Canada, Australia, and the United States, based largely on their lack of technological capabilities (McKillop and Quinn, 2012, p. 23).

Compared to its United Kingdom neighbours, Ireland's credit union system has some unique strengths. According to Thomas, Cryer, and Reed (2008), credit unions in Ireland are self-sufficient, benefitting only from a tax break from the government (p.

111). By comparison, credit unions in the United Kingdom rely on government financial support and are even more limited than Irish CUs in service offerings (Thomas et al., 2008, pp. 108, 109). This autonomy and independence allows Irish credit unions to focus on serving their members' needs, and to adapt their strategies with more freedom than available to their counterparts in the United Kingdom. One example of how this benefits Irish CU members is that Ireland's credit unions are renowned for their commitment to local involvement, supporting a variety of community initiatives (Thomas, Cryer, and Reed, 2008, p. 113). This commitment is seen as "a natural part of a successful credit union movement's involvement with its members" (p. 113). Some researchers even note that Ireland's credit unions are thought of as having a permanent presence in the communities they serve (Power, O'Connor, McCarthy, and Ward, 2012, p. 12). If the same perception is held in Canada, given widespread concerns with rural services retention, CUs could build on this perception of permanence in their marketing. These strengths and perceived commitment to community may help Irish and Canadian CUs compete with banks into the future.

Despite the strengths of the Irish credit union system, some significant challenges to growth and sustainability of the movement exist. Some of the main challenges for the Irish credit union system include an aging membership, competition with banks, limits on services and technology such as debit cards and ATMs (McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward, 2000, pp. 4, 6, 7). Several of these issues that may be understood as affecting credit unions' ability to recruit and engage youth are discussed in more detail later in this literature review.

## **2.2 The Need for Youth Involvement in Co-operatives and Credit Unions**

Credit unions are not alone in their difficulty in attracting young members and elected leaders. The low level of youth involvement in co-operatives is part of the larger societal trend of disconnection from civic organizations and involvement, especially amongst youth. As Putnam notes in his mid-1990s research, involvement in civic organizations, the democratic process and other membership based and voluntary organizations by US citizens is decreasing (Putnam, 1995, pp. 65, 67-69). Putnam attributes this decline of participation in organizations as a sign of declining social capital in communities. For a co-operative, decreasing involvement of youth as volunteers, members, and in the democratic process poses a real threat to their ability to survive in the future. The decline of these traditional methods of building human and social capital through involvement in community and voluntary organizations means that, as Farganis suggests, alternative methods of engaging young people will need to be sought (Farganis, James, 2014, p. 243).

Irish and Canadian credit union (CU) strategies have identified the need to involve young people, seeking to demonstrate that youth input is valued and to ensure youth feel they are doing important work with CUs (Credit Union Central of Canada, 2006, p. 5; McCarthy, Olive, Briscoe, Robert, and Ward, Michael, 2000, p. 6). McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward also argue that youth involvement, or a “hive” of youth activity will attract other youth to participate. They argue that, “a credit union that does not involve young people will have greater difficulty in being attractive to young people” (2000, p. 5). The approaches to youth involvement that Canada and Ireland have implemented are examples of what these theories look like in application. These approaches are described later on in this literature review. What is noticeable in the successes and challenges of

both approaches is that the CUs that have found a way to involve young people have seen the effect multiplied as more young people are attracted to the credit union. Those credit unions that have taken a more adult-driven approach have tended to struggle with levels of youth involvement. However, a possibly adult-driven approach is not the only factor affecting Irish CUs ability to involve young people.

In Canada, the co-operative sector identified the need to involve and educate young people as early as the 1920s, yet challenges remain. Co-operatives have a long-standing commitment to youth education and concern for community (Puchala & Heggie, 2009). As Smith, Puga, and MacPherson outline in *Youth Reinventing Co-operatives: Young Perspectives on the International Co-operative Movement*, "Young people are inevitably carriers of contemporary issues" (Smith, Julia, Puga, Robin, and MacPherson, Ian, 2005, p. xv). As such, youth may be a significant source of information about the direction a co-operative might head to engage members and staff into the future.

The need to attract, develop, and retain young people into the Canadian co-operative sector as staff and members will become increasingly more important to the survival of the sector as leaders and members age (Credit Union Central of Canada, 2006, p. 4). As baby-boomers retire and become less engaged in the democratic leadership of co-operatives, the next generation needs to become involved if co-operatives are to survive. Many co-operatives want to have more young members, staff, and leaders, but struggle with how to reach and engage these young people. For example, in analyzing Nova Scotia Co-operative Council's future leadership challenges, Soots, Perry, and Cowan (2007) note that its Innovation Council seems at a loss when asked to identify young or emerging leaders in the co-operative sector, stating: "Engaging youth in the co-

op sector is a major challenge and as a result there is a lack of leadership on the horizon” (Soots, Perry, and Cowan, 2007, p. 12). Although thousands of young people are educated about co-operatives each year through the Co-operative Youth Education programs in many Canadian provinces, as a demographic group, youth are not engaging in the co-operative sector in large numbers (McCarthy, Briscoe, & Ward, 2000, pp. 2, 4, Credit Union Central of Canada, 2006, p. 4). Co-operatives need youth to become involved as members, staff, and elected leaders, in order to ensure the future sustainability of the sector.

### **2.2.1 Definition of Youth**

There are a number of definitions of youth used both within Canada and in other parts of the world. In Irish credit union initiatives, youth initiatives were focused on young people up to age 30 (McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward, 1999, p. 9). Young & Free Alberta is focused on youth ages 17-25 (Servus Credit Union, 2014). In Quebec, often youth is defined as up to age 35, while some young professionals’ groups in Canada include young people up to age 40. This research uses a definition of youth as people up to and including the age of 30, given the focus on the Irish credit union system.

### **2.2.2 The Need for Youth Involvement in Irish Credit Unions**

In their analysis of what changes are needed in the Irish Credit Union system, McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward (2000) note three areas that need to be addressed, the first of which is ageing membership and the need to address the age imbalance of credit union practitioners (p. 2). Glass, McKillop, and Rasaratnam (2009) find that credit unions become less efficient when a greater than normal percentage of the population retires, further compounding the challenges related to engaging youth (p. 74). The need to

increase levels of youth involvement in Irish credit unions was identified in the early 1990s and has continued to be an issue of concern since.

A main theme of the research reviewed is the concept, “youth attract youth” (McCarthy, Briscoe and Ward, 1999, p. 16). As McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward state in their 1999 research, “it is only by giving youth a real and meaningful input into the operations of a credit union that youth involvement will be maintained” (McCarthy et al., 1999, p. 16). Further, the researchers note, “youth who are already involved in the credit union provide more practical ways to encourage other youth to become involved” (p. 21). This youth-led design resonates with the Irish co-operative principle of “design for use” in that services of the co-op should be designed for members by members (p. 28). These approaches identified in the literature point to what so far appears to be one of the Irish CUs’ main struggles in building youth involvement: building momentum in involving young people in credit unions.

### **2.3 Theories of Youth Involvement**

While Irish researchers have identified a number of strategies, approaches, and recommendations for Irish credit unions to use in building youth involvement, some credit unions still struggle to implement strategies that get strong results or build momentum. In order to better understand the approaches Irish credit unions utilize, which have been recommended by researchers, a number of theories of youth involvement were examined in the literature review.

In one model of youth involvement, Cornforth (2004) outlines a stakeholder theory, wherein ‘user involvement’ is incorporated into a governance structure (p. 17). Cornforth notes that co-operatives are constrained in their ability to adopt a stakeholder

model, due to the nature of democratic elections by the membership, which particularly limits the inclusion of youth (Cornforth, 2004, p. 18). As noted earlier, McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward also state that credit unions will struggle to involve youth if they aren't already involving youth and building a hub of activity (2000, p. 5). The limitations on the governance model may be one factor in systematically incorporating young people into the structure of credit unions. However, some co-operatives and credit unions make a point of including young people into their governance structures, such as Otter Co-op in British Columbia, which had a Junior Director program in place for several years (Otter Co-op, 2013, p. 2).

Another approach that may hold some promise for co-operatives and credit unions is a youth-adult partnership approach. Camino (2005) argues that youth-adult partnerships are an innovative method for community and youth development. Her description of the benefits of a youth-adult partnership model suggests it as a way for youth and adults to work collaboratively for community or program action. Often they are working for the common good of the community or collective (Camino, 2005, pp. 75-76). With this combination of larger community focus, the model could hold promise for engaging youth in co-operatives. This concept builds on the idea of young people and adults working together, as outlined in stakeholder theory, without the limitations of focusing the approach solely within the governance structure.

Camino's theory aligns well with what Roger (2007) advances as a 'positive youth development' approach (Roger, 2007, p. 1), wherein youth are viewed as active agents of change in their community. Roger argues the need for a reconsideration of youth policy and participation in society (p. 470). He also argues that the gap between

youth and leadership needs to be narrowed (p. 477). Gauthier builds on this idea further, arguing that moving from learning to commitment amongst youth happens most often when youth are part of the governance structures and executive bodies of organizations, where they can learn meeting procedures and develop leadership skills (Gauthier, Madeleine, 2003, p. 270). She echoes the idea of the youth-adult partnership, outlining this model as one that achieves the most complete form of participation (p. 270). However, the challenge persists of finding young people willing to invest the time needed to be a part of the governance structures of organizations they may not perceive as aligning with their interests.

Chana (2007) suggests some possible barriers to successfully engaging youth. Chana argues that, “historically, working collaboratively with youth was not taken as seriously given the social and developmental stereotypes attached to youth” (Chana, 2007, p. 2). Combined with this challenge, McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward (2000) report that an Irish League of Credit Unions 1998 study found both fear and apathy in credit unions related to involving youth and developing youth-specific services (McCarthy, Briscoe, & Ward, 2000, p. 4). The challenge of overcoming fear, apathy, and misunderstanding, as well as finding common ground between young people and adults persists, but for credit unions, this challenge must be overcome to help ensure the sustainability of these co-operative businesses.

#### **2.4 How Credit Unions are Involving Youth**

Credit unions have been working to involve young people for many years. Young people are unlikely to become members and board members of CUs without programs to encourage youth participation, a critical mass of young people to entice them, or a



perception that young peoples' involvement is welcome. While both countries have taken action to involve young people, Canada and Ireland have used somewhat different approaches.

#### **2.4.1 Youth Involvement in Canadian Credit Unions**

Canada's national strategy for involving young people in credit unions focuses on attracting and retaining young staff (Credit Union Central of Canada, 2006, p. 4). The strategy was developed the National Young Leaders Committee (NYLC) of Credit Union Central of Canada. The NYLC is composed of young credit union staff from across Canada. The over-arching strategic objective and vision outlined in this strategy was for Canadian Credit Unions to "Become the #1 Employer for young leaders in the financial sector in Canada" (p. 4). The priority focus for the NYLC committee is to support the engagement, development, and retention of young leaders within the system (p. 4). The NYLC has also developed a successful youth mentorship program, which has been running since 2008 (Credit Union Central of Canada, 2014) and has been replicated by the Canadian Co-operative Association for use with co-operatives and credit unions across the country (Canadian Co-operative Association, 2014).

At the provincial level, the Young & Free Alberta program is known as an effective approach to increase youth memberships in Servus Credit Union. Young & Free Alberta, an award-winning initiative of Servus Credit Union, is a "member-focused program... [that] creates engagement and ongoing relationships with 17-25 year olds to help young adults: get money smart..., save money..., and win free stuff..." (Servus Credit Union, 2013). This program has dramatically increased youth membership in Servus, resulting in over 25,000 new youth memberships since the program launched in

2008 (Servus Credit Union, 2013). The program also provides a multitude of resources and financial information for youth, but is primarily a marketing strategy to increase the number of youth members in the credit union.

Both of the Canadian examples provided include aspects of the theories noted earlier in the literature review, such as a youth-adult partnership. Both programs involve young people as leaders, and the young people involved have access to the resources and expertise of adults in the organizations and networks. These programs have seen limited success, but this success has not yet meant an increase in youth involvement for all credit unions in Canada. More options at the local and national levels are needed for credit unions to build youth involvement.

#### **2.4.2 How Irish Credit Unions are Involving Youth**

In the early 1990s, credit unions in Ireland identified the need for a coordinated and strategic focus on engaging young people as the next members, staff, and leaders of their organizations (McCarthy, Briscoe, & Ward, 1999, p. 4). As early as 2000, the Irish League of Credit Unions appointed a Youth Policy Task Force and developed youth policy which recommended appointing youth development officers at national, regional, and local levels (McCarthy, Briscoe, & Ward, 2000, p. 6). The ILCU appointed a National Youth Development Officer, and made recommendations to develop complementary materials, including school education packs for teachers and nationally branded youth products and services (p. 6).

In their research in 2000, McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward mention a few examples of targeted efforts that some credit unions had taken to engage youth, such as the Mitchelstown Credit Union Ltd., that established a youth committee in 1982, worked

directly with the board of directors, provided training and education to youth, youth services, school credit unions, and supported transitions from the youth committee to the board of directors (McCarthy, Briscoe, & Ward, 2000, pp. 4-5). They also suggest that national and local level commitment and action are needed and that “individual credit unions need to implement their own youth strategy while central league and chapter levels must develop appropriate procedures and products” (McCarthy et al., 2000, p. 5). This local level strategy, rather than national level action, appears to be the main approach taken since, along with a National Youth Committee that has been in place since at least 2007 (ILCU, 2014).

Irish credit unions have led various youth-focused activities since 1999. By 1999, most credit unions had already held poster competitions and provided sponsorships to youth groups (McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward, 1999, p. 27). In the same year, youth on credit union committees also suggested ideas to encourage more youth involvement on boards and committees, ideas that are now popular activities of Irish credit unions, namely: being active in local schools (McCarthy et al., 1999, p. 12). Those participants also strongly recommended more training and education activities for youth (McCarthy et al., 1999, p. 12). Newer research suggests that Ireland’s credit unions have become known for focusing their community engagement efforts on working with schools (Thomas, Cryer, and Reed, 2008, p. 114). A recent study of Irish credit unions noted that 93% of credit unions provide sponsorships or donations to local schools, and 45% operate school credit unions (Power, O’Connor, McCarthy, and Ward, 2012, pp. 13-14). In addition, Irish credit unions provide work experience initiatives, visit schools, and conduct educational presentations to youth (Power et al., 2012, p. 13).

The Irish League of Credit Unions (ILCU) continues to develop new ways to involve young people. For example, in February of 2014, they hosted a Credit Union Youth Conference (ILCU, 2014). On the ILCU website, they also list an Art Competition and Schools Quiz as annual activities to engage young people (2014). The ILCU notes that the Credit Union Schools Quiz is a popular and successful annual promotion (2014). The ILCU also has an entire website designed for youth (2014). It includes information about the contests mentioned above, savings tips, games, historical information about credit unions, and links to find a local credit union (2014). Since 2009, they have also been partnering with the Canadian Co-operative Association (CCA) through the ILCU Foundation, to have young people participate in CCA's International Youth Internship Program (ILCU, 2014).

As further research is conducted, we may expect a more complete understanding of the development of activities and services Irish credit unions offer to young people. It is already clear that Irish credit unions have a long-standing interest in involving young people and have developed a wide array of initiatives to encourage youth to support credit unions. More research is needed to determine whether a national strategy is still in effect, and what efforts are being made to involve young people in board and committee work. It is also not yet clear whether targeted initiatives are in place to take young people from an awareness raising level of engagement, such as through the school poster and quiz competitions, into a specific membership recruitment strategy.

## **2.5 Challenges, Barriers, and Limitations in Involving Youth in Credit Unions**

This literature review does not outline all internal and external constraints and challenges that Irish credit unions face. Rather, it focuses on those deemed the most

directly related to barriers to involving young people, as identified in the literature. These challenges, barriers, and limitations range from competition with banks, to limits on available credit union services, and the perceptions and attitudes of CUs and youth.

A challenge for Irish CUs is their day-to-day reliance on volunteers. Irish CUs rely on volunteers to deliver services, ranging from frontline services to serving as board members (Commission on Credit Unions, 2013, p. 81). Irish credit unions have already identified challenges in attracting skilled volunteers (Commission on Credit Unions, 2013, p. 37), especially given the roles they take on as noted above. By relying on volunteers to provide frontline services to members, as the population ages and as young people are not replacing retiring staff and volunteers by a lack of becoming involved, credit unions are even more hampered. This challenge poses a serious risk for credit unions in both service delivery and member recruitment.

### **2.5.1 Competition with Banks**

The 1999 Irish credit union research conducted by McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward identifies banks as a major source of competition for credit unions in attracting new, young members. By 1999, banks already focused on primary school-aged youth (and younger) and even had special accounts available for the estimated 20,000 youth getting Confirmed per year (McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward, 1999, p. 31). While credit unions also pursued some of these activities, banks were perceived to have captured the market. Banks also had school bank programs and sponsorships, and were leaders in money management education, while credit unions lagged in these areas or were not active at all at that time (McCarthy et al., 1999, p. 31). Banks also had ATMs, student packs, grants, money management, and loans for youth already in place in 1999 (McCarthy et al., 1999,

pp. 31-32). Yet, as the researchers note, credit unions “haven’t targeted youth in an efficient manner” (McCarthy et al., 1999, p. 32). This lack of an efficient or comprehensive approach is connected to the independent strategy Irish CUs adopted, and may point to the need for further national level coordination and information sharing.

Banks were also perceived by the 1999 research respondents to have a young, well-trained staff, whereas credit unions were seen as being slow to provide training and staff, who therefore, lacked professionalism (McCarthy, Briscoe, & Ward, 1999, p. 32). Because of the number of young staff and assistant managers at banks, the banks were perceived as “better positioned [than credit unions] to aim services at different youth sectors by having younger people at decision making levels” (McCarthy et al., 1999, p. 32). By 2000, McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward argued that banks had entered the market first in all possible financial services and it was not likely that credit unions could find untapped services to beat the banks to market with (2000, p. 7).

### **2.5.2 Lack of Credit Union Services**

A number of factors affect credit unions’ ability to involve youth and attract new members. The Report of the Commission on Irish Credit Unions identified additional factors that may be hampering credit unions’ ability to involve youth, such as a lack of services and information technology (Commission on Irish Credit Unions, 2012, pp. 37, 38). Irish credit unions are far behind Canadian standards for information technology and breadth of services. For example, the regulatory limit on types of services Irish CUs can provide and limited technology, such as ATMs are identified as factors in hampering attracting new, younger members (Commission on Credit Unions, 2012, p. 91).

Young people want to be able to access their credit union accounts through

modern technology, but the Irish CU system has been slow to provide the infrastructure. In the 1999 McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward survey, youth indicated an interest in new services such as ATMs, student loans, and student accounts (McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward, 1999, p. 28). While some of these services are now available in Irish CUs, this is not the case for all CUs. McKillop and Quinn (2012) also note that Ireland's credit union movement is categorized as less developed than countries like Canada, in part due to the constraints on information technology, such as challenges in accessing broadband internet and lack of familiarity with ATMs (p. 23).

Glass, McKillop, and Rasaratnam (2009) note that Irish credit unions are constrained in their ability to compete with banks, as they also cannot provide mortgages or wealth management products (p. 74). The limit on the type of services that Irish credit unions may provide means it will be more difficult to attract young members looking to buy their first homes or to start investing. Anyone that wants access to these services will have to engage the services of a bank. The lack of a complete service offering, coupled with less technology and infrastructure than banks, can lead to increased perception challenges amongst youth.

### **2.5.3 Attitudes and Perceptions**

The research offers varying perceptions of youth and credit unions. These perceptions do not always align and may be an indicator of the need for further open communication and more interaction. In the 1999 McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward research, 75% of board members surveyed indicated that young peoples' views were encouraged and respected in their credit unions (McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward, 1999, p. 24). This finding is somewhat in contrast to younger board members' perceptions, as indicated by

their responses to the question about whether board members think their credit union's level of service for youth is good. While 69% of board members older than age 30 thought youth services were good, only 55% of board members under age 30 felt the same way (McCarthy et al., 1999, p. 28). Further, in McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward's (2000) research, 57% of credit union board members felt their organizations did nothing to encourage youth participation (p. 5).

Youth on credit union committees had somewhat divergent opinions as to "whether credit unions encourage youth participation on committees". Older youth in McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward's research responded much less positively than did their younger counterparts. The research indicates that 94% of youth aged 18-25 on committees responded positively to this question of CU encouragement for youth committee participation, while only 47% of youth aged 26-30 answered positively (McCarthy, Briscoe and Ward, 1999, p.11).

The 1999 research by McCarthy, Briscoe and Ward offers several notably positive statistics. These include 55% of the 62 Irish CUs surveyed note reported having youth (age 30 or under) on their boards (McCarthy et al., 1999, p. 8). Also of note, 60% of credit union volunteers identified that gaining work experience was the main advantage of youth involvement in credit unions (McCarthy et al., 1999, p. 15).

However, less positively, 66% of the credit unions surveyed had no youth representation on committees. While there were a total of 59 youth on committees, all of these youth were from just 21% of the credit unions (McCarthy et al., 1999, p. 9). While there were some positive levels of involvement in 1999, challenges persist for Irish credit unions, with more recent research noting the lack of progress in increasing the number of



youth that become involved as volunteers and board members in the credit unions (Walsh, Paul J., 2012, p. 83).

## **2.6 Chapter Summary**

Chapter 2 examined co-operatives and credit unions, their philosophy and approach and in particular, profiled the Irish credit union system and their efforts to involve youth. Credit unions have a demonstrated long-term interest in and commitment to wanting to involve young people, but the perfect strategy to do so remains elusive. This Chapter summarized how some credit unions in Canada and Ireland are already involving youth, to provide insight into the different models being used and inform the reader of the work already done to involve youth.

As noted, credit unions face challenges in involving more youth. Some of these challenges relate to the changing way that young people relate to and engage in community organizations and the corresponding decline of social and human capital. Other challenges relate to the limitations and constraints on Irish credit unions, ranging from the competition with banks, to limitations on services that CUs can offer. Constraints with the localized and independent approach taken by Irish CUs were also revealed, perhaps indicating the need to increase the level of national coordination and efficiency that could be achieved in their youth involvement efforts.

Attitudes and perceptions of credit union boards, staff, and youth may also be challenges that affect the success of credit unions in involving young people. As Irish CUs continue to work on increasing youth involvement, using a positive youth-adult partnership approach, as described by Camino (2005), may help create an environment where both adults and young people want to be involved in the credit union. The research

notes that as young people get involved, momentum builds for more youth to get involved.

Qualitative interviews will be needed to better understand what Irish credit unions are doing to involve young people and why they are taking that approach. Chapter 3 presents the methodology utilized to further explore the topics discussed and gaps in knowledge gaps identified in this Chapter. Interviews and more data are needed to fill in the gaps in secondary data gathered so far. Procedures to be used and further information about the selection of participants and how data will be collected follows in Chapter 3.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology and Procedures**

Chapter 3 is a description of the methodology and procedures used to gather and analyze the data in this research. This Chapter explains the rationale for the methods used and presents how primary data collected in the interviews relates to the secondary data. Finally, this Chapter describes how the researcher's methods increase validity, reliability and trustworthiness of the findings.

Chapter 3 begins with details about the design of this case study research. The selection of the site and participants is followed by information about data collection and instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data interpretation and analysis. A summary of the pilot study is included as well as a discussion of the limitations and ethical considerations of the researcher's approach to the research question and selected methodology. The Chapter ends with a summary and description of Chapter 4.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This case study provides the opportunity for the researcher to build a comprehensive understanding of Irish credit unions' (CUs) youth involvement efforts. Given Ireland's long-standing interest in involving young people, and their existing breadth of programming in this area, a case study approach was selected as the most appropriate approach. A case study provides the opportunity to articulate the experience of those involved in Irish credit unions.

The research seeks to form an idiographic explanation of Ireland's approach, recognizing the limitations of the scope of the study, available data and resources, and variability of local context and conditions. The researcher assumes there will be many factors that influence why Irish credit unions have chosen the approach they are using to

increase youth involvement. Several of these factors are identified and examined in this study, but an exhaustive listing and in-depth analysis of all factors were not within the scope of this study. It is hoped that by identifying additional factors that may be impacting youth involvement levels in Irish CUs, the study presents additional context that may be useful for Canadian CUs and co-operatives seeking to implement their own youth involvement initiatives. Given the interest in youth involvement in CUs in Canada and Ireland, and the ongoing actions by Ireland's CUs, the researcher deduces the need for and commitment to involvement of young people in credit unions as the basis for this case study's rationale.

### **3.2 Selection of Site and Participants**

Ireland and its credit unions were selected as the site for this research primarily because of the country's long-standing interest in and commitment to involving young people in credit unions, reaching back to the early 1990s (McCarthy, Briscoe, and Ward, 1999, p. 4). While co-operatives and credit unions in many countries identified the issue, Ireland is the only country that the researcher has found that has acted on the need for national approaches for so long. In addition, the researcher located academic research to draw upon that focuses on Irish CUs' youth initiatives and strategy. Given the continued interest of CUs in increasing youth involvement in Ireland, the researcher focused on the Irish case with the assumption that their experience will provide examples of successful approaches and lessons learned.

Participants for qualitative interviews were recruited by email invitation. Credit union websites in Ireland featuring youth content on their websites were utilized as the main criteria to initiate contact, and where a Youth Officer was listed on the websites, the

Youth Officer was the first point of contact. The researcher invited selected Canadian CUs to participate in the research based on these CUs recent and planned youth-focused initiatives and geographic diversity. Email was selected as the main form of contact to accommodate for the difference in time zones between Ireland and Canada, where the researcher is based. Email also provided an affordable way to establish and maintain contact, gain access to existing documents, and maintain a written record of data. Similarly, contact with Canadian credit unions was largely focused on email communication, although one Canadian and one Irish credit union interview were conducted by phone.

Initially, the researcher contacted one of the Irish researchers that conducted the 1990s and early 2000s research about youth involvement in Irish credit unions. This researcher recommended contacting the National Youth Policy Task Force of the Irish League of Credit Unions (ILCU) in order to gain more current knowledge and information. The Task Force is often referred to as the National Youth Committee. ILCU staff support for the National Youth Committee was contacted by email. The researcher requested recommendations on where current information could be sourced. ILCU staff provided the researcher with several documents to help inform this research project, offered to provide assistance and information as available, and provided recommendations for potential interviewees. The researcher also relied on snowballing; as interview responses were received, respondents were asked for recommendations of whom else to interview.

Participant selection was based on a number of factors. Response to initial email inquiries with Irish CUs was minimal with only one of seven Irish CUs responding after

first contact was made. Subsequently, the researcher emailed the initial seven CUs again, emailed an additional 10 Irish CUs, and two Canadian credit unions to request their participation in the research. Six Irish CUs and two Canadian CUs participated in the interviews. Participants selected for interviews included representatives from:

- Irish League of Credit Unions National Youth Committee members;
- Irish League of Credit Unions staff;
- Members of the Board of Directors of Irish credit unions;
- Irish credit union Youth Officers and Chapter Youth Officers; and
- Irish and Canadian credit union staff responsible for youth-focused initiatives.

The researcher chose to gather interview data from multiple members of the National Youth Committee and multiple Youth Officers in order to provide further validity to the findings of the research by assessing the similarities and differences in the opinions of different people in those roles. The National Youth Policy Task Force / Committee was selected as a main focus point under the assumption that its members are the most likely to be analyzing and assessing youth involvement efforts on an ongoing basis and would also have insight into local and national initiatives and their successes and challenges. Youth Officers were selected as another focal point for the research due to their involvement and expertise in working with youth at the local and Chapter (regional) levels. Where no Youth Officer position existed, the researcher invited a CU staff person responsible for youth initiatives to participate in the research. Several of the respondents were active in multiple roles, for example several of the Youth Officers were also National Youth Committee members. The researcher selected interview subjects with the intention of gaining new and different data and perspectives than what other

interviewees could provide, and largely, by their willingness to participate in the research.

### **3.3 Data Collection and Instrumentation**

This study uses both secondary and primary data. Secondary data consists of various documents, non-statistical information, complemented by written interviews with key informants (produced by others). This secondary data is complimented by qualitative data produced by the research. The researcher conducted six structured interviews with various actors in the Irish credit union system, and two structured interviews with Canadian credit union staff to provide additional information to inform the study. The majority of the interviews were conducted by email, with one each of the Irish and Canadian interviews conducted by phone or video call. The phone and video interviews also included some unstructured dialogue.

Interviewing those involved in the Irish and Canadian credit union systems provided another way to understand the current context in each country's efforts to increase levels of youth involvement, as well as the successes and challenges of the case. Interviews provided opportunity for those involved to tell their story and a direct explanation of the work being done in Ireland and Canada to involve young people in credit unions.

#### **3.3.1 Secondary Data**

The researcher began secondary data collection from academic and publicly available documents and proceeded to structured written and phone interviews. Existing research papers and reports outlining Irish credit unions' approach to involving young people served as part of the base for data collection in advance of interviewing

respondents. Secondary data was utilized to better understand the current and historical approaches to youth involvement in credit unions in Ireland. The researcher triangulated this data with the primary qualitative data, discussed below, in order to improve the reliability of the findings.

### **3.3.2 Primary Data**

Due to the financial and time zone constraints of this research project, email interviews were selected as the primary method of interviewing subjects through a structured written interview instrument. The researcher provided the option for respondents to participate via a phone call, video call, or in writing. Six respondents participated by written email response and two respondents participated by phone or video call.

The researcher chose to interview multiple respondents to increase the reliability and trustworthiness of the research findings as well as gather data from people involved in different ways in the Irish and Canadian credit union systems. This process provided the opportunity to both gather new information and confirm with greater certainty any common themes, perceptions, and experiences of respondents. The interviews provided new insights and information about what programming and strategies exist, as well as the rationale for both.

The written interview instrument included nine or ten open-ended questions, depending on the role of the interview respondent. Irish Youth Officers were provided with nine questions, as were other Irish and Canadian CU staff responsible for youth programming. ILCU staff and National Youth Committee members were provided with a ten-question long interview instrument. Open-ended questions provided the opportunity



for respondents to be able to tell their stories and share their experiences and perceptions. The researcher selected a structured interview format primarily to accommodate financial and time zone constraints. The questions were developed to elicit new primary data about the current state of youth involvement in Irish and Canadian credit unions, why that approach is being taken and what some of the successes and challenges are. A sample of the interview instruments is attached as Appendix A.

### **3.4 Data Collection Procedures: Interviews**

Written and phone interviews were conducted in March of 2014. Before the interviews were conducted, the researcher made initial contact with potential interviewees by email. The initial email outlined:

- the purpose of the project and type of information being sought;
- that if the potential interviewee agreed to participate, they would be sent an informed consent form and the interview questions; and
- a description of the proposed format of the interview (i.e. using a structured written or phone interview instrument) and a request for the respondent to confirm what format they preferred.

Once interviewees agreed to participate, the researcher sent a second email with an informed consent form attached, explaining the need and purpose of the form, and the interview instrument with a requested return date for the completed written interview, or potential dates for a phone interview. In some cases, the interview instrument and informed consent form were sent in one email with all of the above noted information, to expedite the participation of respondents. Sample of the emails, and informed consent forms are attached as Appendix B. Upon receiving the completed interview instrument,

the researcher sent another email thanking the respondent and reminding them of their ability to opt out of the research at any time and that they would have the opportunity to reaffirm their consent for use of the information through a subsequent member check.

Respondents were sent member check emails in April of 2014. These emails reminded respondents of their ability to reaffirm or remove consent for the researcher's use of the data they provided through the interview instruments. Respondents were provided with a copy of the data from their responses to be included in the final research report and requested to reply by email with their consent or removal of consent of the researcher's planned use of the data.

The researcher focused the interview questions to elicit responses that would provide primary data to help answer the research question and sub questions. Questions focused on building an understanding of what strategies and initiatives are in place, and why CUs have focused their youth initiatives the way they have. The intent was to gather data that would provide different perspectives and information, depending on the role(s) of the respondent. The goal was to gather enough data to compare responses for similarities, differences, and themes in relation to the research question.

Interview questions did not focus on gathering a quantitative understanding of CUs' strategies and initiatives. The researcher developed questions that allowed for perceptions, personal experience, and learning to come through in the responses. The researcher felt that these personal accounts would provide a richer understanding of the Irish CU case than what would be possible by compiling a quantitative understanding of the initiatives in place. The researcher also had limited resources to conduct the study, and a comprehensive quantitative analysis was not possible.

The majority of the interviews were conducted by email. The written email interview format worked well. It provided the researcher with concise responses to the interview questions, and helped ensure that pertinent primary data was collected. Given time zone differences, the written interview format was also a practical approach to accommodate respondent and researcher schedules. The downfall of the written interview format was that it did not provide a venue for open, unstructured dialogue, and therefore, the data may be more limited than would have been the case if the interviews were conducted by phone or in person.

Two phone interviews were also completed and transcribed. The phone format provided more data than the written format, some of which came from unstructured dialogue. While this additional data was valuable to the research, these interviews ended up taking longer than expected to conduct, which may have led to less focus on the interview instrument questions responded to later in the process.

### **3.5 Data Interpretation and Analysis**

This case study was a way for those involved in Irish credit unions to tell the story of their youth involvement initiatives. The researcher designed the study to allow them to speak through the research. Secondary and primary data were interpreted and analyzed separately and then together, through various techniques. The data interpretation and analysis methods were selected due to the scope of the project, the qualitative nature of the data collected, and the relation of the existing data to the experience and perceptions of the respondents.

#### **3.5.1 Interpretation of Data**

Themes began to emerge from the historic, academic, and publicly available data, in advance of the collection of the primary data. The researcher utilized analytic induction of secondary data, such as previous research papers and current publications, since these materials were directly related to the subject matter. Non-academic data and publications were used to supplement academic research, as the researcher found little current, academic research focused on the study topic.

### **3.5.2 Analysis of Data**

The researcher built on the themes that emerged from the secondary data with the incorporation of the interview data, employing constant comparative analysis as the primary data emerged. The case study was interpreted with an emphasis on data collection and those interviewed telling their stories, rather than by analyzing the data through coding or statistical analysis. Combined with the secondary data, this approach allowed the researcher to find patterns and relationships amongst all of the data analyzed.

Units of observation included individuals, credit unions, and social artifacts such as research reports, policy documents, strategic plans or other historical data. The unit of analysis was a credit union or the Irish League of Credit Unions. The researcher used historical and comparative methods to discover patterns on a limited basis. Documents from the organizations researched, academic databases and public information such as websites all contributed to a historic understanding of the data.

### **3.5.3 Validity and Reliability of the Findings**

By employing a variety of data collection and analysis processes, the researcher sought to demonstrate the dependability of the data.

Triangulation of data was incorporated to increase reliability and validity. There were few scholarly articles found to triangulate data with, however, there was some publicly available information to compare to. Primary data was triangulated with a combination of secondary data from the literature review, and other documentation and reports, policy and strategy documents, annual reports, peer reviewed journal articles, as well as the primary data from the interviews. By triangulating and cross-referencing the primary and secondary data, the researcher was able to increase the dependability of the findings.

The researcher strengthened reliability by conducting interviews with multiple subjects thereby providing different perspectives and broadening the reliability of the data collected. In addition to interviews, the researcher built reliability by connecting themes and content from the primary interview data with written and historical documents, contributing to a consistent analysis of the data collected. Interview questions were designed to ensure maximum reliability, where appropriate and applicable. A combination of face, criterion-related, and content validity were built into the interpretation and analysis of the data.

### **3.6 Pilot Study**

A pilot study of the structured interview instruments was conducted in January of 2014. The pilot test subject was a Canadian woman in her early 40s, with an academic background in psychology studies. To simulate the data collection technique utilized for the research, the pilot study was conducted by email. The test subject received a sample of the introductory email, the informed consent form, and the interview instrument. After

the test subject had reviewed the materials and returned her responses, the researcher then communicated with the test subject by phone to gather feedback on the instrument.

The pilot test subject reported that the written interview instrument provided the opportunity to respond in a flexible format. The format, while less fluid than an interview in person or by phone, allowed the respondent to take the time to articulate their responses and to return to the questions if need be. The test subject indicated that the written format, length of responses required, and the time needed to complete the instrument were fine.

### **3.7 Limitations**

This study is not an exhaustive cataloguing of all Irish credit union initiatives focused on young people. Rather, the study utilizes a sampling of examples of national and local initiatives in Ireland in a case study format. As the focus of the research was understanding what initiatives are in place and why, the researcher chose to focus on gathering data to further examine the experiences and perceptions of those involved, rather than a quantitative listing of the number of initiatives. The approach taken in this study is that there are lessons to be learned from the youth involvement initiatives in Ireland and this research will study what Irish CUs are doing in this regard.

Based on the willingness to participate in the research and provide information, the information and responses provided and how the responses compare to other data analyzed, the researcher has assumed that respondents provided honest answers to the data collection instrument. The researcher ensured that participants provided informed consent and were advised that their responses would not be completely anonymous, given the nature of the case study and their unique contributions to the research. Where

possible, the researcher generalized the description of participants. The lack of anonymity, and the static nature of the majority of the interviews may have limited the information that respondents provided. The interview instruments were designed to learn more about what is in place and why. Irish and Canadian CUs have already identified the need for more action to involve youth, this research is intended to provide a better understanding of initiatives that others are finding success with, which may help CUs assess options for new activities. Finally, participants were provided the opportunity to conduct member checks on the information they provided to ensure they consent to how their responses were used.

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

As this research is a case study, the researcher was limited in the ability to maintain anonymity of the participants. To mitigate this challenge, participants were advised that anonymity would not be maintained and informed consent was obtained from all participants. To ensure that sufficient care and protocols were followed, the researcher obtained approval for the research from Cape Breton University's Research Ethics Board. A copy of the Research Ethics Board approval letter is attached as Appendix C.

The researcher maintained confidentiality of the interview subjects and as much anonymity as possible. Interview participants were advised of their ability to voluntarily participate and withdraw from the research. Once interview materials were collected, identifying information was removed or generalized to descriptive titles where possible.

### **3.9 Chapter Summary**

Chapter 3 provided a description of the methodology and procedures utilized in this case study. As noted, a case study was selected to provide a sample of the current state of youth involvement in Irish credit unions, with the hope that this information may be of use to Canadian co-operatives and credit unions seeking to involve more young people in their organizations. This Chapter provided information about the selection of Irish credit unions as the focus of the study, as well as an outline of the data collection instrumentation used and why that format was chosen. Chapter 3 included a discussion of how the data was interpreted as well as an outline of the limitations and ethical considerations factored into this research.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of this research. New knowledge claims are outlined and related to existing data. Chapter 4 explains how the researcher analyzed the new data and knowledge from secondary and primary data.



## **Chapter Four: Findings**

Chapter Four presents the findings of the research. Chapter Four examines and discusses primary data in relation to the secondary data provided earlier in the study. The researcher presents themes that emerged from the data, including understanding the breadth and depth of existing Irish credit union (CU) programming, what is working well, and what some of the challenges are with existing programming. The Chapter includes data outlining why the Irish CUs have chosen their current approaches, along with more detail about how they arrived at these approaches, and several comments from the credit unions about what has been learned. The researcher also incorporated information from Canadian CU respondents for comparison. There is a discussion of the significance of the data presented in each section. The Chapter ends with a summary of the findings presented and information about Chapter 5.

### **4.1 Strategies, Policies, and Initiatives in Place**

Irish CUs have a wide array of programming and initiatives in place at the local, regional, and national levels. Many of the national and some local level programs have been in place for 20 years or more, and have strong participation rates throughout Ireland. Strategies and initiatives in Ireland are mostly focused on increasing and retaining young members at CUs, however there are some activities designed to increase participation of youth as volunteers or elected leaders. One Irish CU noted that due to the economic downturn, they have not hired new staff in seven or eight years, but that if they did, they would prioritize hiring young staff. As discussed in Chapter 2, Canadian CUs have focused nationally on increasing the number of young staff members, and at the

individual credit union level are working to increase membership levels or representation at the governance level.

Several respondents indicated that their CU does not have a formal strategy or policy in place, however all respondents offer a variety of ongoing and annual youth initiatives. This finding is of note primarily because the Irish League of Credit Unions (ILCU) Rules for Chapters of the Irish League of Credit Unions document includes the development of a youth policy for the Chapter as the first duty of a Youth Officer (ILCU, 2005, p. 8). It may be that this policy-setting task is reserved only for Chapter Youth Officers, rather than Youth Officers at individual CUs, or the Rules may have changed since publication of the document in 2005. During the course of the research, one Chapter Youth Officer participated, and that respondent did describe their work at the Chapter level in educating other Youth Officers as well as their participation in the National Youth Committee.

#### **4.1.1 Local Initiatives**

There are a wide variety of initiatives in place at the local level in Ireland. There were a couple of initiatives, like Interview Skills Day, that only one respondent mentioned. However, all respondents indicated that their CUs deliver multiple of the initiatives listed below. Local level initiatives noted by respondents include:

- Primary School Saving Schemes and School Credit Unions;
- Secondary School Credit Unions, often run by students in the school and supervised by Youth Officers;
- Youth Officers;
- Work Experience Programmes;

- Youth Committees;
- Volunteer Development Programs, which may lead to involvement in the board of directors;
- Welcoming and encouraging young board members and committee members;
- Scholarships and Bursaries, especially for students going to 3<sup>rd</sup> level (post-secondary);
- Discounted student loan rates;
- Interview skills days;
- School visits to the CU boardroom;
- Social media promotions, predominantly on Facebook and Twitter, although multiple other social media platforms were mentioned;
- Sponsorships, of youth groups, sports clubs, sports tournaments, etc.;
- Young People Awards; and
- School Presentations.

Many Irish CUs are committed to having a strong presence among youth at the local communities level. School CUs are one example of this dedication to a strong local presence, as they require weekly CU staff time on-site at the schools. Almost all Irish CU respondents talked about their work with School CUs. As one Youth Officer explained:

*Our Credit Union is very focused on engaging youth as members as we recognize the importance of building relationships with our younger members and continuing this relationship with them as they grow up. We feel it is important to be actively involved in the community and to be familiar and approachable to our young members. (Chapter Youth Officer and NYC Member)*

School CUs are much more predominant in Ireland than in Canada. That said, one Canadian CU respondent noted that they have a school savings program. VanCity Credit Union also has a well-established Youth Credit Union program, established in 1996 and currently reaching 2,000 youth and involving 25 schools (Vancouver City Savings Credit Union, 2014). However, these two Canadian credit unions are, to the researcher's knowledge, some of the only school or youth CU programs in the country. Canadian CUs' limitations in offering School CUs or savings programs may be directly linked to the amount of human resources dedicated to youth programming.

Many Irish CUs have Youth Officer (YO) or Chapter Youth Officer positions. One respondent indicated that all CUs have a Youth Officer. YOs can be elected by the board or be a staff person. YOs implement local youth programming and often dedicate significant time to overseeing the School Savings Schemes and School CUs. One YO noted that expanding School CUs to new schools is challenging, given the weekly visits needed to each school involved. Some CUs that participated in the research have multiple YOs on staff, which may provide for more capacity to offer more School CUs.

The existence of the YO positions is in contrast to the majority of Canadian CUs. Both Canadian respondents noted the challenge of budgeting for or prioritizing ongoing, dedicated human resources to focus on youth initiatives. Canadian CU staff noted:

*From 2010-2013 we had a 'Youth Coordinator' position to build strong relationships with youth members, business development in the demographic, etc. Recently the person holding this position has moved into another position, and*

*due to budgetary constraints this position will not be filled in 2014. (Atlantic Canadian CU Staff)*

*I came to our CU in 2010 and everyone recognized that we needed to get a younger membership, that we needed to drive our average age down and start attracting younger people, but nothing was ever being done about it. As much as we'd say it was important, if we proposed the idea that we should have a campaign specifically focused on youth, just to get people to come in the door – it got shot down because what we really needed was to sell mortgages. So, what we kind of realized was that people were always kind of putting off the long-term needs for the short-term needs. So what happened was, we had budgeted for a summer student in our communications team in 2013 and by the time it got to the point of hiring... the communications manager... couldn't take on another person. So... I snapped that position up and said this is what we're going to use it for: we're finally going to put a concentrated effort towards youth. (Western Canadian CU Staff)*

Three Irish respondents mentioned that their CU has a youth committee.

Similarly, a Youth Community Council featured in the data provided by one of the Canadian respondents. One respondent noted that the committees are a key feature of the Irish CU approach:

*One of the key initiatives used by credit union is the Youth Committee structure. A number of credit unions would set up a youth committee in the credit union. The*

*age ranges can vary – some aim this at 15-24, others perhaps at the 15-18 range. The Youth Committee is generally tasked with developing strategies and initiatives to promote credit unions to their peers. The Committee gets a good grounding in how credit unions operate and can often keep their connection with the credit union and serve on the credit union board when an opportunity arises.*

*(ILCU Staff)*

#### **4.1.2 Regional and National Initiatives**

There are a number of regional and national level programs and initiatives.

Additional details and summary of many of these initiatives is included as Appendix D.

Regional and national level initiatives include:

- CU Schools Quiz;
- Art Competition;
- GR8 Savers Week;
- Student Loan Campaign;
- Music and Talent Competitions, for example, talent competitions aimed at teenagers, such as CU Factor;
- National Youth Conference;
- National Youth Committee;
- World Council of Credit Unions Young Credit Union People Programme (WYCUP); and
- Chapter / Regional Youth Officer Events and Education Opportunities.

Many of these initiatives are conducted as competitions first at the local level, then at the regional level, and finally, at the national level. Participation rates of several of these initiatives are detailed in Table 2. Some initiatives have been around for almost 30 years, while some, like CU Factor, have been more recently developed.

Table 2

*Statistics of Key National Irish Credit Union Youth Initiatives*

<u>Initiative</u>	<u>Ages</u>	<u>Participation</u>	<u>Participation Rate</u>	<u># Years In</u>
		<u>Rate, Youth</u>	<u>Credit Unions</u>	<u>Existence</u>
Schools Quiz	up to 11, 11 - 13	25,000	over 300	23
Art Competition	7 and under 8-11, 11-13 14-17, 18+	30,000	over 300	29
GR8 Savers Week	mostly 13 and under	growing	n/a	4
National Youth Conference	staff	200 staff	110	8
National Youth Committee	staff/volunteers	n/a	7 people	10
WYCUP	up to age 35	2 awarded	varies	13

Initiatives at the local and national levels include a wide range of ages. Some programming, like Savings Schemes or School CUs, may begin as young as age 4, while other programming focused on attracting board members includes up to age 35. Many of

the initiatives are focused on teenagers, although it seems that the most popular initiatives, such as the national Art and Schools Quiz programs and School CUs are largely focused on younger children (note that the Art competition does include categories up to adult level). Focusing on the young ages may also be a result of the difficulty expressed by several respondents in retaining the interest and involvement of teenagers and those in their 20s.

National level initiatives include both staff focused and youth focused activities. More national level initiatives are designed for CU staff than at the local level. The largest national initiatives, like the Schools Quiz and Art Competitions, are focused on youth and youth members. To put the participation rates of these two popular Irish programs (55,000 combined) into perspective, Table 3 compares these rates to what the equivalent participation level would be among Canadian youth.

Table 3

*Youth Population and Equivalent Program Participation Levels in Ireland and Canada*

<u>Country</u>	<u>Youth Population</u>	<u>Equivalent Participation Level</u>
Ireland	1,559,840 <sup>a</sup>	55,000 <sup>b</sup>
Canada	5,674,100 <sup>c</sup>	198,593

Notes: <sup>a</sup> Irish youth population based on ages 0-24 (Central Statistics Office, 2014).

<sup>b</sup> Assumes no overlap of participation between the two Irish initiatives counted.

<sup>c</sup> Canadian youth population based on ages 0-14 (Statistics Canada, 2014).

## **4.2 What is Working Well**

Respondents mentioned several youth initiatives that they feel are working well. One of the most commonly noted areas amongst respondents is their work with primary



school aged youth, and schools. Many respondents also cited national level events as examples of initiatives working well. The participation rates of several of the national events noted in Table 2 further demonstrate the popularity of these initiatives.

#### **4.2.1 Working with Primary School Aged Youth**

Several respondents mentioned that working with primary school aged youth, and working with the schools was going well. Working with this age group was seen as a good way to connect with young people, a good source of new members, and a way to maintain good relationships with schools. Respondents indicated the following:

*Credit unions have very strong links with primary schools and have very high membership penetration rates at this age group compared to other financial institutions. Most credit unions run primary school savings schemes. (ILCU Staff)*

*The youth strategies we have in place ensure that each year as new children join the local schools they are signing up to become Credit Union members. Therefore we almost have a guaranteed increase year on year of youth membership. (Irish CU Staff responsible for Youth Initiatives)*

*... We have very good relationships with the schools and they like the approach we have of coming every week and letting the students help operate the school CU. (Youth Officer and NYC Member)*

#### **4.2.2 National Level Events and Connections**

National-level events and initiatives fall into two main categories: those focused on youth, and those focused on staff. Respondents noted both types of activities as working well. The popularity and longevity of some of the national-level youth-focused activities detailed above underscores how well these initiatives are doing. One Chapter Youth Officer noted:

*All National youth events work well and receive good co-operation from local schools and the students enjoy getting involved. (Chapter Youth Officer and NYC Member)*

Some respondents cited the importance of information sharing, and the ability to work together that comes from staff-focused initiatives. The most frequently mentioned staff focused initiative was the Credit Union Youth Conference. Respondents said:

*... Sharing information amongst credit unions is also critically important. Initiatives such as the annual Credit Union Youth Conference serve as a platform for credit unions to share information with their peers and to work together for a stronger combined outcome. (ILCU Staff)*

*I attended the Annual Youth Conference in February where representatives from all over Ireland meet to discuss Youth Development in Credit Unions which is brilliant to meet other staff and youth officers involved in youth development and share ideas and attend presentations on various topics. I am also on the National Youth Committee and we meet several times during the year to review policies*

*and set the agenda for youth involvement and it aims to promote and encourage a standard approach to youth development. (Youth Officer and NYC Member)*

Incorporating a combination of national and local level initiatives and supports may be an important factor in the successes of the Irish CUs' approach. As the first level of interaction with credit unions, working with youth in primary schools helps set lifetime perceptions of CUs. While local level initiatives are important, as respondents noted, there is great value in also being able to come together as staff at the national level to share information, learn from each other, and work on bigger initiatives than what could be undertaken alone.

Responses to the "what is working well" interview question were the most divergent between Irish and Canadian respondents. Canadian respondents tended to focus on their successes in educating youth about financial literacy, and their digital presence and knowledge. One Canadian respondent, whose overall approach to youth involvement is quite similar to Irish CUs' approaches, also talked about the level of engagement of their Youth Council.

#### **4.3 Challenges, Barriers, and Limitations to Youth Involvement**

Challenges noted by the interview respondents largely echoed the challenges, barriers, and limitations explored in Chapter 2 that were identified in previous research. There were, however, new insights into CUs' experiences and current challenges. A number of challenges, barriers, and limitations are explored in this section, including competition with banks, lack of ability to keep pace with technology and service demands, and attitudes and perceptions.

### 4.3.1 Competition with Banks in Resources, Technology, and Service Offerings

There are multiple challenges in CUs' ability to compete with banks. Nearly all respondents in both countries indicated that competition with banks is a concern or challenge. The challenges for Irish CUs largely focused on their lack of technical ability to provide modern services. One Irish Youth Officer stated this challenge as:

*... we are up against the Banks who are paying the schools to let them in and also the Banks have more automated services eg. App's, Student ATM Cards etc. Also the Banks lure them with expensive Rugby Jerseys, Ipad Draws and generous donations to the schools. We do not have these type of budgets... The banks just come in and all they want is to get an account opened. (Youth Officer and NYC Member)*

Competition with banks further exacerbates Irish CUs' pace and lesser ability to implement new and modern technology and the technology based services that youth expect. While this constraint was identified in previous research from over 20 years ago, some of the same items, such as providing ATMs, are still identified as lacking. A Chapter Youth Officer stated:

*One factor which is affecting youth involvement in Credit Unions is improvements in technology which are allowing banks to offer services which credit unions as yet do not provide for example, ATMs, transferring money via smartphone apps and online banking. Due to the increasing use of these methods by the younger generation this could be a factor which they consider when deciding whether or not to join their credit union. (Chapter Youth Officer and NYC Member)*

A staff member of ILCU expanded on the impacts on attracting and retaining young members that stem from the lack of technology and related services:

*In relation to attracting (and retaining) young members, the principle challenge for Irish credit unions is the lack of a range of electronic payment services.*

*Although a growing number of credit unions (mostly large credit unions) can offer payment accounts, the majority offer standard savings and loan accounts, with most relying on 'branch banking' to offer access to the account. Most do not offer debit cards, ATM access, online / mobile banking etc.*

*In many cases, this means that credit unions struggle to retain young members, particularly if they leave their local area to go to college. Credit unions also do not have an on-campus presence. Without being able to access their account remotely, young members can drift away from the credit union. If credit unions could offer a wider range of services (particularly online and mobile banking), they would be much more likely to retain young members. (ILCU Staff)*

The impact of this lack of services and technology can also be seen in challenges with participation at the School Credit Union level. One Youth Officer noted that among first year School CU participants surveyed, the inconvenience of having to come to the CU branch can lower their interest in participating:

*They prefer to keep the money at home in a jar, not bothered to save and also told us that they would have to get up to our CU office to withdraw funds. Principals*

*in the schools do not want them withdrawing money for security reasons, so they have to come up to our office to withdraw funds. (Youth Officer and NYC Member)*

In contrast to Ireland, one Canadian credit union talked about technology and digital presence as one of their strong points:

*... On the digital side I feel we're quite strong. That's one where I don't feel we need to put a lot of effort in, we just need to keep up – to maintain our place. (Western Canadian Credit Union Staff)*

Despite Canadian CUs' having more developed and advanced technology and services than the Irish, challenges still persist:

*We're not as flexible and responsive as I would like to be. The process it took to build that new free account product was quite intensive and it took a long time. And so there are other products that we identified that we would like to have, and they're not even on the radar yet. From a technical perspective, we just can't pull them off that quickly. Whereas some credit unions, I think they're on a newer banking platform that might have better flexibility. (Western Canadian Credit Union Staff)*

What may be more challenging in the future is a looming difficulty of Canadian CUs to continue to compete with large banks on technology-based activities. One Canadian respondent expressed concern about:

*...The pace of technology and credit unions' potential inability to keep up, compared to some larger competitors. (Western Canadian Credit Union Staff)*

#### **4.3.2 Attitudes and Perceptions**

Based on the primary data gathered, attitudes toward youth involvement in Irish CUs seem to be more positive what was noted in the previous scholarly research conducted in 1999 and 2000. Given the success and longevity of several of the existing initiatives, it makes sense that CUs view youth involvement more positively than decades ago. For example, whereas previous research had indicated that a constraint to increasing youth involvement was fear and apathy on the part of some credit unions, attitudes in Irish CUs seem to have shifted. One respondent from the ILCU indicated that:

*There is a growing realisation of the importance of putting young people at the heart of credit unions and reaching out further to young people. Although a growing number of credit unions are focusing on youth involvement, there still exists a large cohort who are not active in this area. It is likely that the lack of involvement is principally due to a resource issue (particularly for smaller credit unions) rather than apathy. (ILCU Staff)*

By comparison, as might be expected, given the past Irish experience, a newer style of youth-focused initiative planned at a Canadian credit union was greeted with some initial resistance:

*...As something totally new and different, you run into resistance. So the idea of this street team and the amount of money that we want to spend on it, it took*

*convincing to get certain people to buy into that idea... So that was a challenge and it took some education... The first time I said experiential marketing most people didn't know what that meant. And then you kind of explain it in layman's terms and then it's, "okay, I understand that, but I'm still not sure it's worth spending the money on, but we'll trust you". (Western Canadian Credit Union Staff)*

While most respondents provided positive comments related to youth attitudes and participation, attitudes among teenagers can sometimes be a challenge. One Irish Youth Officer mentioned the challenge of getting secondary school aged boys to save and participate in the School Credit Union. One YO noted two examples related to attitudes about saving and participation in these CU activities:

*I was finding it very hard to get the secondary school boys to save, so I decided to move over to the primary boys school... I thought that if I got them saving in the primary school that they would continue to save with the same account in the secondary school. NOT SO! The attitude is it is not COOL to save when they are in the bigger school... The secondary school girls are great for saving but we find great difficulty in getting the boys from 12 – 17 to save. They come back to us saving when they want a Car Loan. That is all the boys think about - their 1<sup>st</sup> car. (Youth Officer and NYC Member)*

*Since the "Celtic Tiger" in Ireland when the financial situation was much better, younger people grew up with money not being a problem and getting things*



*instantly and the old ethos of having to save for everything kind of went out the window. Banks were giving 100% mortgages etc., and credit was plentiful so young people thought all you had to do was to put your hand out and you got money. Also there were plenty of part time jobs for the students and they had plenty of money to spend. Now with the downturn, things are very much different, but it is still hard to get them to save. (Youth Officer and NYC Member)*

On a related note, another Irish respondent identified an issue relating to the challenges most CUs are facing in engaging 12-18 year olds. The challenge of engaging this segment, and in fact, whether they are even interested in CUs, may be an issue for wider consideration:

*Sometimes I think that we're trying to offer them something that they don't want... They can't get a loan because they're under 18. So it's kind of like, "yes, save at a CU, to save your money", but... I think we're missing the thing- we're kind of missing it. I think we say, "oh we do want to be like a bank," but in fact, young people want to bank because they want their cars, to buy their bits and pieces, they want to be able to do their thing... they want it cheap. (Youth Officer and NYC Member 2)*

### **4.3.3 Emigration and the Economy**

Several respondents pointed out that increases in emigration are impacting their ability to retain young members when they finish secondary school. Whether youth leave their communities for post-secondary education or for work, young people are exiting the

local area. For Irish CUs', this emigration trend increases the challenge of retaining young members even more, since many CUs do not have debit cards, linked payment systems, mobile banking, or the technology and services for members to access their accounts from elsewhere. One Irish CU staff person said:

*The challenge is getting the children to continue to save and use our credit union when they leave the local schools to attend college... Many Irish college graduates are currently leaving Ireland in search of work abroad reducing the numbers seeking employment. Also, the number of youth currently employed in Ireland is low due to economic factors; therefore the level of disposable income available is low, affecting saving and borrowing levels in this age category. (Irish CU Staff responsible for Youth Initiatives)*

One Canadian respondent also talked about emigration being a challenge for their CU as well, in terms of future ability to have younger board members:

*In our region there is a high level of outward migration (young people leaving the province to work in western provinces with more employment and income opportunities). This has been very challenging because when youth members leave the youth council team, they aren't joining the regular board as board members and many have left the province to work elsewhere which means the efforts in engaging them could be potentially lost if they don't return to our communities. (Atlantic Canadian CU Staff Responsible for Youth Initiatives)*

A recent major development among Irish Credit Unions may provide some short-term relief in Irish CUs' ability to compete with banks, by enabling the technology and services needed to attract and retain young members. The initiative, entitled the Credit Unions Service Organization for Payments (CUSOP), represents a way for CUs to provide electronic payment services, such as direct deposit and bill payment services. An ILCU staff member explained:

*In November 2013, the Credit Unions Service Organisation for Payments (CUSOP) was granted a Payments licence by the Central Bank of Ireland... The vision driving the initiative was that all credit unions who wish to provide payments services to members should be enabled to do... Ultimately, 169 credit unions signed up for CUSOP. These credit unions serve more than 1.4 million members.*

*CUSOP is a core payments infrastructure dedicated to meet credit unions' needs. It is a shared 'not for profit' service for the benefit of all participating credit unions. It will enable members to have payments from a bank, employer or social welfare office paid directly into their credit union account via electronic transfer. It also has the capability, over time, to deliver wider payment services such as direct debits, debit cards and ultimately a full on-line banking service to credit unions and their members.*

*It is hoped that this initiative will bring about the development of a wide range of electronic services to a large number of credit unions (and their members) and*

*result in credit unions being positioned to offer a much wider range of services to young members. (ILCU Staff)*

While overall positive attitudes and perceptions may be an indicator of the potential for continued commitment to dedicated resources for youth initiatives, there are still some challenges. As noted by youth themselves, interest in CUs may not be as high among teenagers. This perception is reflected in the research conducted by a Canadian CU, which is highlighted later in this Chapter.

External factors like increasing rates of emigration and the economic downturn will continue to have an impact on Irish CUs. The introduction of CUSOP may lessen this impact somewhat, as members can access their accounts from afar. However, the economic downturn is also increasing pressure on CUs to focus on shorter-term priorities, which may pose growing challenges for resourcing youth initiatives. The need to focus on short-term goals rather than youth involvement, which is viewed as a long-term investment, was mentioned as an issue by Irish and Canadian CUs. An ILCU staff stated it this way:

*With loan books falling (reduced demand for loans across the board), credit unions are very much focused on the short term (reducing cost base / increasing income streams). Youth involvement would be considered by some as a long-term issue and not one which bears a quick return. (ILCU Staff)*

#### **4.4 Why Credit Unions Have Chosen Their Current Approaches**

Respondents noted various reasons as to why their CUs utilize their current approaches to youth involvement. Many focused on how their current approach came to be rather than why they have focused their efforts this way. As described earlier in this Chapter, the overall Irish CU approach comprises a combination of local, regional, and national initiatives. One respondent noted that their approach is based in part on a perceived benefit from local involvement in the schools:

*We have been going to the schools for the last 10yrs or more and find that the interaction with the students in the school is very beneficial. The students... love the idea of lodging the money at the desk themselves, rather than their parents doing it. They love the way we stamp every completed page "Well Done". It is a great sense of achievement for them, seeing their money grow and learning that every little counts and it all adds up. (Youth Officer and NYC Member)*

One Canadian CU respondent explained that while they will continue to work with and market to all ages of youth, they plan to focus their new efforts on a few key ages when youth make big financial decisions. Therefore, they plan to not focus a lot of their efforts on teenagers, which is a very different approach than the majority of other CUs. However, this approach fits well with the experiences noted by several respondents, who expressed challenges in engaging this age group. The Canadian CU is focusing on where the opportunities are to get youth to open a credit union account. It should be noted that the Canadian example focuses only on gaining youth members, not on the broader education and involvement initiatives that many Irish CUs include. The Canadian respondent explained their approach and learning this way:

... The way we decided to look at it is we broke them into three different age ranges. 18-25 for us is the primary one we want to go after. Because once people hit 18, that's kind of when they start to take ownership of their finances. That's when they're faced with their first big decisions. But because of that, there's an opportunity to win them at that time. We go back to the youngest age group, we looked at it as, um, 6-10, because that's the age group where most kids get their first account. And so there, that's another opportunity to win them, if we win them the first time, then you're not having to steal them from someone else, but you're not marketing to them, you're marketing to their parents... And there's that in-between age, kind of that 11-17. And, I think it's an easy trap to fall into, to try to market really hard to that group, but we decided we're not going to. Because most of those people already have their account- their first account - so they're not going to switch, so the ability to actually win them is next to zero. So all we want to do with that age group is stay relevant. We will have activities, but there will be no hard sells, no conversions, just kind of our brand presence, just trying to establish who we are and what we stand for. So that by the time they hit that 18 age group, that it's not a cold call. For us, I think that was a huge learning.

*(Western Canadian CU Staff Responsible for Youth Initiatives)*

Despite Ireland's overall success in involving young people, one respondent noted a challenge that echoes the Western Canadian CU's rationale and strategy to not focus as much on 12-18 year olds. The Irish respondent noted that although many young people participate in the existing programming, youth are not engaging in CUs at a deeper level.

The respondent expressed that CUs could use the 12-18 year old time period to simply keep CUs top of mind for youth:

*So we have great young people involvement, but it's engaging them is the problem. And realizing that we can't offer these 12-18 year olds anything. But it doesn't mean we can't give them things, to keep CUs in their head. (Youth Officer and NYC Member 2)*

#### **4.4.1 How Credit Unions Arrived at Their Current Approaches**

Several Irish respondents noted that their CU's approach developed out of direct connection and contact with the local community and schools, while others referenced gaining inspiration and ideas from other Youth Officers or national events. Some examples of these stories:

*We approached the schools and asked them for their permission. We felt it was best to get into the schools. We see it is a form of advertisement also as even the students who do not save with us will know that their local Credit Union was always there in their school, every week. (Youth Officer and NYC Member)*

*All the initiatives mentioned have evolved from our close ties with community organizations. (Credit Union Staff Responsible for Youth Initiatives)*

*Our Youth Officer went to a Best Practice Conference for Youth Development and came back with the idea of the Youth Advisory Committee. (Youth Officer and NYC Member)*

*It has been more of an evolution than a revolution. There is a growing realisation of the importance of putting young people at the heart of credit unions and reaching out further to young people. The development of national strategies and initiatives are predicated on the uptake by credit unions.*

*The approach has been adapted based on changes which have taken place in the marketplace. For example, in recent years, the use of social media has become a critical area for credit unions (the ILCU provide extensive training and support to credit unions in this area). Equally, the growing demand for electronic services from credit unions (particularly by young people) has increased the importance of focusing on developing services in this area. (ILCU Staff)*

Canadian respondents identified different development paths for their strategies. One Canadian CU noted that the concept started with their Youth Coordinator working with the board of directors and together, identifying peer-to-peer and leadership components to the ensuing strategy. Another Canadian CU identified that they developed their strategy from the results of an extensive research process designed to help them better understand youth needs and interests, current best practices and competitors, and the data to back up their insights and findings. This approach in particular has led to the development of a much different approach than any other CU interviewed. This strategy is not yet fully launched, so results of this approach are not yet known.



#### 4.4.2 Changes to the Strategies, Lessons Learned, and Advice for Credit Unions

Respondents provided numerous messages about their own experiences, lessons learned, and recommendations for CUs. Overall, respondents did not focus on how their strategies have changed over time. They tended to focus more on overarching recommendations for CUs to consider. These included:

*Give it a go – working with the young people. They are our members of tomorrow, our savers and our borrowers. We need to keep investing in them and this message needs to be made stronger and stronger right across the country. They only have to be asked to do things and they respond and love a bit of responsibility also. (Youth Officer and NYC Member)*

*... You have to define who youth is for you... because you can't just say youth and treat them all like the same group. (Western Canadian CU Staff Responsible for Youth Initiatives)*

*The importance of all Credit Unions to focus strongly on youth development, to appoint a youth officer within every credit union and to work together and learn from other credit unions as to new ideas and best practices. (Chapter Youth Officer and NYC Member)*

*It is clear that young people's attitudes to credit unions are extremely positive. They like the ethos, the not-for-profit structure and the deep roots in local communities. However, there is a clear demand for a wider range of services*

*from credit unions. For the Irish credit union movement to attract and particularly retain younger members into the future, the development of a range of payment services is critical. Initiatives such as CUSOP have a vital role to play in the roll out of a payments infrastructure to a large number of credit unions and their members. By having the product range clearly demanded by younger members, credit unions can further enhance youth involvement and continue to go from strength to strength. (ILCU Staff)*

*Do not look for an immediate impact on the bottom line in your efforts to market/engage youth. It is all about building an early, lasting relationship for future business. It's a LONG-term growth and sustainability effort and difficult to determine the short term impact on the bottom line. Don't lose hope in the early stages. (Atlantic Canadian Credit Union Staff Responsible for Youth Initiatives)*

*... The important thing that I find within CUs is listening to others. There's so many CUs out there that have done it, tried it, and did it again, so, don't invent the wheel, but just improve it. (Youth Officer and NYC Member 2)*

*Keep investing in the youth, keep involving them in the Credit Unions at all ages, maybe get very small child saving products up and running, keep them involved through Social Media, advertise on these modern channels. We can't get messages out to them if we are not on the same platforms as they are ie.*

*Instagram, Snapchat, Mashable, Twitter, Facebook and all the others. (Youth Officer and NYC Member)*

*Developing close relationships in the community and staying core to the Credit Union principles has been key to running these youth initiatives. (Credit Union Staff Responsible for Youth Initiatives)*

From the data gathered, it is clear that those working on youth involvement initiatives at CUs find value and long-term benefit in the approaches used. Involvement of local communities and schools are seen as key to the majority of the strategies described. The Western Canadian CU youth strategy, as mentioned, is a very different approach from all other strategies and approaches presented. There may be lessons for other CUs arising from each approach. Also of note are the multiple references to viewing youth involvement as a long-term strategy with long-term benefits. As CUs face increasing pressure to produce short-term results, youth initiatives as outlined in this research may be threatened. However, the need for new and younger members for CUs will persist.

#### **4.5 Chapter Summary**

Chapter 4 presented the findings of the research. Information from research respondents addressed questions about the nature and type of strategies, initiatives, and policies in place in Irish and Canadian CUs, and summarized what aspects of these approaches are working well and what the CUs' challenges are. The research highlighted

why the CUs adopted the approaches that they have, how their strategies were developed, and what they have learned from their work to increase levels of youth involvement.

Chapter 5 outlines the conclusion of the research. A summary of the research is presented, along with discussion of the findings. The Chapter includes implications of the research, recommendations, and potential future research topics. Finally, Chapter 5 ends with a final conclusion section.

## **Chapter Five: Summary, Discussion, and Implications**

This study sought to identify Irish credit union (CU) strategies and policies to increase youth involvement, and why CUs took their stated approach. While Canadian CUs also identified the need to increase levels of youth membership and engagement, Irish CUs have taken action to address the issue for over 20 years. The purpose of the study was to discover what Irish CUs are doing and why, to better understand their successes and challenges, and how they have adapted their approach over time. Qualitative structured and semi-structured interviews of Irish CU staff responsible for youth initiatives focused on understanding current approaches to youth involvement, understanding external factors that may be impacting CUs, and learning what aspects of their strategies are working well. Interviews with Canadian CU staff provided comparative data about Canadian approaches. Secondary data provided additional insights to complement the primary data gathered in the interviews.

### **5.1 Summary of the Study**

The research was designed as a case study. Secondary data including reports, academic journals, peer-reviewed papers, industry documents, websites, and strategy documents were utilized. Primary data was gathered through eight structured and semi-structured, qualitative interviews, conducted in March of 2014. Participants were selected by their connection to CU youth initiatives, and several participants were referred to the researcher from other respondents. In order to accommodate geographic constraints, the majority of interviews and communication were conducted by email, although two interviews were conducted by phone. In light of the methods used, the researcher selected a case study as an appropriate format to showcase the data and findings.

Primary and secondary data were analyzed in the development of the study. Utilizing analytic induction, themes began to emerge as the secondary data was collected. The themes were built upon during the collection of primary data, using constant comparative analysis. Data was triangulated, and the researcher conducted multiple interviews to strengthen reliability.

Findings suggest that many Irish CUs have a broad-based, long-term approach to involving youth as current and potential future members. The data indicate that there are a wide variety of initiatives in place at local, regional, and national levels for youth from ages 0-35. Staff support, through Youth Officer positions, is common amongst Irish CUs, but Canadian CUs indicated challenges in dedicating ongoing human resources to work on youth initiatives.

Irish and Canadian CUs identified challenges in their ability to keep pace with technology demands and changes, especially in relation to attracting and retaining young members. Competing with banks and banks' much larger resource base were common challenges mentioned by CUs. The introduction of the Credit Union Service Organization for Payments (CUSOP) system in Ireland may help to temporarily alleviate some of these technology challenges.

Economic downturns and subsequent youth emigration was also found to be a significant factor in youth involvement levels in several Irish and one Canadian CU. This challenge is more acute for Irish CUs, where currently, members cannot access their accounts from anywhere but in their local CU branch. The implementation of CUSOP may help, but young member retention rates are still anticipated to be of concern for Irish and Canadian CUs.

Credit unions developed their current approaches to youth involvement various ways and for various reasons. A short-term focus of the strategies is attracting youth to become members. However, at the heart of the focus on increasing youth involvement, CUs want youth to get actively engaged and to understand the community-based approach and commitment of credit unions.

One realization arising from the research is a better understanding of the comparative state of credit union technology and related services in Ireland and Canada. While Irish CUs are several decades behind Canada in implementing technology to provide standard services in Canada such as ATMs, bankcards, mobile banking, and direct deposit, CUs in both countries expressed concerns about their abilities to keep up with changing technology needs, especially in competing with banks. The 2014 introduction of the Credit Union Service Organization for Payments (CUSOP) system enabling credit unions to offer electronic payment services is one step toward addressing these issues in Ireland.

A surprising finding for the researcher was the breadth and depth of CU youth initiatives in Ireland. Whether measured by the number of participants in national programs like the Schools Quiz and Art Competition, or the popularity of School Credit Unions, by Canadian standards, Irish CUs are interacting with a sizable number of young people each year. The presence of staff to work on youth initiatives through Youth Officer positions adds a capacity to Irish CUs' work in this area that the majority of Canadian CUs do not match.

Findings suggest the importance of continuing to invest in increasing youth involvement in CUs. Several respondents also stated that CUs should view youth

involvement as a long-term approach. As indicated in Chapter 4, an ILCU staff respondent phrased this concept as the “growing realization of the need to put youth at the heart of credit unions”. From the data provided by Irish CUs interviewed, their approach includes solidly resourced, prioritized, and entrenched commitment to youth involvement. While signing up youth members is part of the focus, respondents discussed the desire to deliver meaningful youth engagement programming. The Irish CU combination of long-term resources allocated at the local, regional, and national levels, and commitment to engaging youth beyond signing them up as members is decidedly different than the current state of the majority of youth involvement initiatives in Canadian CUs.

Respondents from both countries identified challenges in engaging 12-18 year olds. Both also indicated the need to offer age-segmented initiatives. As one Canadian CU noted, focusing their member recruitment efforts on segments of the youth market that are more likely to be interested in CUs at the time, such as those signing up for a first account, or those attending post-secondary, may be a way for CUs to maximize their efforts in recruiting young members.

## **5.2 Implications**

Two implications for consideration in credit unions’ practice were identified in the research. One implication relates to resourcing youth involvement work, and the other relates to the value of and need for information sharing and peer learning. The first implication may be of greater consideration for Canadian CUs, while the second implication may be of value to consider for both Canadian and Irish CUs.



The ability to provide ongoing, dedicated staff time to developing and implementing youth initiatives is often a challenge for Canadian CUs, and is a marked difference between the Irish and Canadian CU approaches. The benefits of permanent staff positions dedicated to youth are multiple, and implementing this model in Canada could have a sizable impact for Canadian CUs seeking to increase youth memberships and involvement. Given Irish CUs' technology limitations, they have still been able to attract many young members, in part because of their commitment to youth involvement.

The importance of peer learning, information sharing, and collaboration was a common theme arising from primary data. Irish CUs have several ways for staff to discuss youth involvement strategies, challenges and successes. Based on the data gathered, Canadian CUs have less opportunity to contribute to and learn from these types of discussions. Finding and supporting ways to facilitate information sharing and learning among CU staff will provide new ideas, help identify ways to address challenges, and create opportunities for staff to develop collective approaches and responses to the question of how to increase youth involvement in CUs. A similar approach of collaboration and information sharing to addressing technology challenges may also serve Irish and Canadian CUs well.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

The researcher offers several recommendations related to the findings and implications of the research. It is recommended that Irish CUs maintain, and that Canadian CUs develop, more opportunities for staff to come together to discuss youth involvement initiatives. There is value in these learning opportunities, and offering more opportunities and opening up participation to more people can provide a wider reach for

the discussions. A second recommendation for Canadian CUs is to invest the human and financial resources necessary to commit to a long-term approach in working to increase levels of youth involvement in credit unions. As Irish CUs are well aware, it is recommended that they increase their technological capability, thereby increasing their selection of connected and mobile services that will appeal to youth. Third, it is recommended that Canadian CUs provide a range of initiatives for young people to get involved in. Part of the unique strength of the Irish CUs' approach is the diversity of youth initiatives, ranging from one-time participatory events like the Schools Quiz, to ongoing, more in-depth activities like School Credit Unions and youth committees. Offering a variety of activities increases the opportunity for young people to get involved and learn about the CU at their level of interest. Finally, it is recommended that in addition to a diversity of initiatives, CUs may want to implement initiatives that focus on different segments of the youth demographic. There are vastly different service and programming needs among the range of ages encompassing the youth demographic. Segmenting may provide CUs with the ability to focus their efforts more efficiently on those youth that are most likely to be interested in particular aspects of the CU model and services.

#### ***5.4 Further Research***

Throughout the course of this research, the researcher identified several questions for further examination in future research. First, as more segmented youth initiatives are implemented, and in particular, in the Western Canadian CU case, as focus on the 12-18 year olds is diminished, further research to determine the impact of this approach would be useful. A second area for additional research is to assess the impact of Irish CUs'

existing youth involvement work, as it relates to youth perceptions of credit unions. What difference in member attraction and retention, and youth perceptions overall is there between youth that have participated in Irish CU youth initiatives versus those that have not? Given the level of member penetration in segments of the youth market and Ireland overall, as well as the reach of wider CU initiatives like sports sponsorships, it may be challenging to locate youth not impacted by the work of Irish CUs. Third, additional research identifying changes to rates of youth member retention as Irish CUs implement new technology such as CUSOP may provide new understanding of the relationship between providing technology based services and youth member retention. Fourth, while Irish CUs have achieved a comparatively high level of youth engagement versus their Canadian counterparts, it may be helpful to identify whether there is a standard, or replicable level of youth engagement needed to retain young members over time. A final area of research for consideration is to examine the perceptions of youth related to the CU model overall. Namely, how relevant and of interest are CUs to young people? Do CUs need to consider adapting the model to attract and retain the next generation of members, staff, and elected leaders?

Several limitations constrained the research. One limitation was that the majority of Irish CU respondents were Youth Officers or National Youth Committee members. While these respondents were knowledgeable contributors to the research, more diversity of roles among respondents might have provided some differences in the primary data collected. To address this limitation in future research, research could be conducted or promoted by the Irish League of Credit Unions, perhaps resulting in wider participation, or an additional interview instrument could be promoted to CU management or board

members. The other limitation on this research was the number of respondents and participating CUs. Future research that could provide a quantitative analysis may be useful for CUs.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is clear that credit unions recognize the need to attract and retain youth members, staff and elected leaders. The findings reveal that successes can be achieved in increasing levels of youth involvement when resources are dedicated to this work. Respondents noted the importance of working together and sharing information and ideas at regional and national levels. By collaborating, sharing information, and investing in these regional and national discussions, CUs can achieve more than they could on their own. Balancing short-term pressures to generate revenue with longer-term benefits of increasing the number of young CU members can be challenging. Irish respondents indicated that persistence is needed to increase youth involvement, and that there is value in investing in these efforts for the long-term benefit of CUs. Credit unions everywhere need to attract and retain the next generation of members, staff, and elected leaders. The experience of Irish CUs may provide some insights into how Canadian CUs might approach the challenge of increasing youth involvement.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Instruments**

Appendix A includes examples of the three interview instruments used in the study. The interview instruments were developed for:

- Irish Credit Union Staff and Youth Officers
- National Youth Committee / Youth Task Force Members and ILCU Staff
- Canadian Credit Union Staff

#### **1. A Case Study of Youth Involvement in Irish Credit Unions**

##### **Irish Credit Union Staff Interview Questions**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my Case Study of Youth Involvement in Irish Credit Unions research project. I have included information below about the purpose of the research, as well as my contact information, in case you have any questions or concerns while you are completing the interview.

There are nine questions on the next page for you to respond to. Please complete them to the best of your ability and if you don't have a response for one or more of the questions, please just leave that question(s) blank.

Please note that as this research is a case study and you have a unique perspective on the research topic, I will not be structuring my research report to maintain anonymity. However, you will have the opportunity to review the sections of my report that include excerpts from the information you provide, to ensure you consent to the information being used. You may choose to cease your participation in this research at any time. If

you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher, Victoria Morris, to inform her of your intention to withdraw from the study.

**TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY AT ANY TIME PLEASE CONTACT**

**THE RESEARCHER:** Victoria Morris, Phone: 1-306-229-2490, Email:

[victoriamorris@sasktel.net](mailto:victoriamorris@sasktel.net)

### **RESEARCH PURPOSE**

This research is a case study of youth involvement in Irish credit unions. The purpose of the study is to investigate what the Irish credit union system is doing to involve young people as members, staff and elected leaders.

Specifically, the research will address the following question: *What are Irish credit unions doing to involve youth (up to age 30) as members, staff and leaders in their co-operatives?*

To answer the research question, this study focuses on examining the following aspects of Irish credit unions' policies and strategies related to youth involvement:

- What strategies and policies are in place?
  - What aspects of this approach are working well?
  - What are the challenges?
- Why this approach?
  - How did they arrive at this strategy?
  - What has changed and/or been learned from the initial strategy up to now?

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How does your credit union currently work to increase youth involvement in credit unions?

2. Is your credit union focused on engaging youth as members, staff, and/or elected leaders?
3. How was the idea/strategy developed?
4. What aspects of the strategy are working well?
5. What have been some of the challenges?
6. What, if any, other factors outside of the credit union system do you believe are affecting levels of youth involvement in credit unions?
7. What lessons would you want to share with others?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience and observations of your credit union's youth involvement work?
9. Is there anyone else or other credit unions you would recommend I speak to about this?

## **2. A Case Study of Youth Involvement in Irish Credit Unions**

### **Irish League of Credit Unions National Youth Task Force Questions**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my Case Study of Youth Involvement in Irish Credit Unions research project. I have included information below about the purpose of the research, as well as my contact information, in case you have any questions or concerns while you are completing the interview.

There are 10 questions on the next page for you to respond to. Please complete them to the best of your ability and if you don't have a response for one or more of the questions, please just leave that question(s) blank.

Please note that as this research is a case study and you have a unique perspective on the research topic, I will not be structuring my research report to maintain anonymity. However, you will have the opportunity to review the sections of my report that include excerpts from the information you provide, to ensure you consent to the information being used. You may choose to cease your participation in this research at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher, Victoria Morris, to inform her of your intention to withdraw from the study.

**TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY AT ANY TIME PLEASE CONTACT**

**THE RESEARCHER:** Victoria Morris, Phone: 1-306-229-2490, Email:

[victoriamorris@sasktel.net](mailto:victoriamorris@sasktel.net)

### **RESEARCH PURPOSE**

This research is a case study of youth involvement in Irish credit unions. The purpose of the study is to investigate what the Irish credit union system is doing to involve young people as members, staff and elected leaders.

Specifically, the research will address the following question: *What are Irish credit unions doing to involve youth (up to age 30) as members, staff and leaders in their co-operatives?*

To answer the research question, this study focuses on examining the following aspects of Irish credit unions' policies and strategies related to youth involvement:

- What strategies and policies are in place?
  - What aspects of this approach are working well?
  - What are the challenges?
- Why this approach?

- How did they arrive at this strategy?
- What has changed and/or been learned from the initial strategy up to now?

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How does the Irish credit union system currently work to increase youth involvement in credit unions?
2. How was the idea/strategy developed?
3. How has the approach changed over time?
4. What aspects of the strategy are working well?
5. What have been some of the challenges?
6. What is the role of the National Youth Committee?
7. How long have you been involved in the National Youth Committee?
8. What, if any, other factors outside of the credit union system do you believe are affecting levels of youth involvement in credit unions?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience and observations of the Irish credit union system's youth involvement work?
10. Is there anyone else or other credit unions you would recommend I speak to about this?

### **3. A Case Study of Youth Involvement in Irish Credit Unions**

#### **Canadian Credit Union Staff Interview Questions**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my Case Study of Youth Involvement in Irish Credit Unions research project. I have included information below



about the purpose of the research, as well as my contact information, in case you have any questions or concerns while you are completing the interview.

There are nine questions on the next page for you to respond to. Please complete them to the best of your ability and if you don't have a response for one or more of the questions, please just leave that question(s) blank.

Please note that as this research is a case study and you have a unique perspective on the research topic, I will not be structuring my research report to maintain anonymity. However, you will have the opportunity to review the sections of my report that include excerpts from the information you provide, to ensure you consent to the information being used. You may choose to cease your participation in this research at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher, Victoria Morris, to inform her of your intention to withdraw from the study.

**TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY AT ANY TIME PLEASE CONTACT**

**THE RESEARCHER:** Victoria Morris, Phone: 1-306-229-2490, Email:

[victoriamorris@sasktel.net](mailto:victoriamorris@sasktel.net)

### **RESEARCH PURPOSE**

This research is a case study of youth involvement in Irish credit unions. The purpose of the study is to investigate what the Irish credit union system is doing to involve young people as members, staff and elected leaders.

Specifically, the research will address the following question: *What are Irish credit unions doing to involve youth (up to age 30) as members, staff and leaders in their co-operatives?*

To answer the research question, this study focuses on examining the following aspects of Irish credit unions' policies and strategies related to youth involvement:

- What strategies and policies are in place?
  - What aspects of this approach are working well?
  - What are the challenges?
- Why this approach?
  - How did they arrive at this strategy?
  - What has changed and/or been learned from the initial strategy up to now?

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How does your credit union currently work to increase youth involvement in your credit union?
2. Is your credit union focused on engaging youth as members, staff, and/or elected leaders?
3. How was the idea/strategy developed?
4. What aspects of the strategy are working well?
5. What have been some of the challenges?
6. What, if any, other factors outside of the credit union system do you believe are affecting levels of youth involvement in credit unions?
7. What lessons would you want to share with others?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience and observations of your credit union's youth involvement work?
9. Is there anyone else or other credit unions you would recommend I speak to about this?

## Appendix B

### Pre-Interview Communications and Informed Consent Form Templates

Appendix B includes templates for email communications with prospective interview participants, as well as a sample of the Informed Consent Form used in this study.

#### EMAIL #1 – Referrals

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am conducting an applied research project for my Master's degree and I am hoping I could interview you to help me gather more information. My research is a case study of youth involvement in Irish credit unions. XXXX told me that you would be a good person to interview for my research, given your involvement in [Irish credit unions/ youth involvement initiatives/ research on this topic].

I am hoping you would be willing to complete a brief interview of about 10 questions that would help me gather information for my research? I would need about 30 minutes of your time. I am based in Canada, so we would need to do the interview either by email, Skype or phone. I am hoping to conduct interviews in February or by early March at the latest.

If you agree to participate, there are a couple of details we would need to sort out before the actual interview, including confirming the format for the interview and I will need to obtain a signed informed consent form from you. The informed consent form is intended to give you a clear understanding of the purpose of my research, how your information will be used, and how you can withdraw from the study at any time if you change your mind about being involved.

Would you be willing to participate in an interview for my research? If so, please let me know and I will follow up with the next steps. I would be happy to provide more information and/or a copy of the interview questions in advance if that is helpful.

Thank you for considering my request and please let me know if you are willing to participate.

Victoria

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### **EMAIL #1 – To Strangers / Not Referred**

Hello,

I am conducting an applied research project for my Master's degree here in Canada and I am hoping I could interview someone at your credit union that is involved in youth initiatives (possibly a member of the Youth Advisory Council or a staff person that works on youth initiatives), to help me gather more information about how your credit union involves young people in various programming. .

My research is a case study of youth involvement in Irish credit unions. I am conducting an 8-10 question interview (by email, Skype or phone) with a few people involved in different ways in some of the youth initiatives that the Irish credit union system is leading, to provide more information than I can access just from websites, reports and other research. I am hoping you could put me in contact with someone at your credit union that would consider being an interview participant for my research.

I can provide more information about my research and the interview questions whenever needed. Thanks in advance for any help you can provide in connecting me with someone from your credit union that might be willing to participate in my research.

Sincerely,

Victoria Morris

\_\_\_\_\_

**EMAIL #2**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my research project, examining youth involvement in Irish credit unions.

As I mentioned in my first email, there are a couple of details we will need to sort out before the actual interview, including confirming the format for the interview and I will need to obtain a signed informed consent form from you. The informed consent form is intended to give you a clear understanding of the purpose of my research, how your information will be used, and how you can withdraw from the study at any time if you change your mind about being involved.

Before we get started on the actual interview process, I will need to obtain a signed Informed Consent form from you. Attached is an Informed Consent form. Please read through this form, it is intended to give you a clear understanding of the purpose of my research, how your information will be used, and how you can withdraw from the study at any time if you change your mind about being involved. After you've read through the form, please send me back a signed copy of the form.

To send the signed Informed Consent form back, you can:

- scan and email me the signed document at [victoriamorris@sasktel.net](mailto:victoriamorris@sasktel.net),
- fax it to 00-1-306-244-2165, or

- mail it to me at 311 28<sup>th</sup> Street West, Saskatoon, SK S7L 0K6 Canada. If you are going to mail the form back, please send it as soon as possible, because I need your signed form on file before I can interview you.

Please note that as this research is a case study and you have a unique perspective on the research topic, I will not be structuring my research report to maintain anonymity. However, you will have the opportunity to review the sections of my report that include excerpts from the information you provide, to ensure you consent to the information being used.

Given that you are in Ireland and I am Canada, we will need to decide how the interview will be conducted. There are a few options:

- I can send you the questions by email and you can respond by email
- We could do the interview by Skype call or video call
- We could do the interview by phone

It is easiest for me to conduct the interview by email, but if you would prefer to talk by phone or Skype, we can easily set it up. Please let me know what works for you.

Thank you,

Victoria

\_\_\_\_\_

### **EMAIL #3**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you again for agreeing to be interviewed for my research project, examining youth involvement in Irish credit unions. I have about 10 questions I would like to ask you to respond to which I think should take 30 minutes or less of your time. I

have received your signed Informed Consent Form, thank you. We are ready to proceed with the interview, which you've indicated you would like to do by email. Attached are the interview questions.

Thank you for your help,

Victoria

## **Informed Consent Form**

### ***A Case Study of Youth Involvement in Irish Credit Unions***

#### **Research Purpose:**

This research is a case study of youth involvement in Irish credit unions. The purpose of the study is to investigate what the Irish credit union system is doing to involve young people as members, staff and elected leaders.

Specifically, the research will address the following:

***What are Irish credit unions doing to involve youth (up to age 30) as members, staff and leaders in their co-operatives?***

To answer the research question, this study focuses on examining the following aspects of Irish credit unions' policies and strategies related to youth involvement:

- What strategies and policies are in place?
  - What aspects of this approach are working well?
  - What are the challenges?
- Why this approach?
  - How did they arrive at this strategy?
  - What has changed and/or been learned from the initial strategy up to now?

**Researcher:**

Victoria Morris, Graduate Student

Master of Business Administration in Community Economic Development

Shannon School of Business, Cape Breton University

[victoriamorris@sasktel.net](mailto:victoriamorris@sasktel.net), (306) 229-2490

**Supervisors:**

*Primary Supervisor:* Michael McNamara, PhD.

Professor, Creativity & Creative Thinking, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Sheridan College

Phone: 905-845-9430, extension 2843 Email: [michael.mcnamara@sheridancollege.ca](mailto:michael.mcnamara@sheridancollege.ca)

*Secondary Supervisor:* Matt Hern, PhD.

Urban Studies Professor, Simon Fraser University

Email: [mhern@sfu.ca](mailto:mhern@sfu.ca)

**Research Description:**

This research will utilize a qualitative, semi-structured interview tool. Interview data will be supplemented in the research study by historical documentation, secondary data, statistics and scholarly research.

All information collected is confidential and will only be used as part of research work being carried out by the researcher, through Cape Breton University. All data collected will be stored in a secure location. Access to questionnaires will only be granted to the researchers listed above or assistants working directly for them. Data, when



reported, will be in aggregate form wherever possible. Research respondents may be identified in the research, but you will be provided the opportunity to review any data utilized that identifies you personally and provided with the option to not be personally identified.

You may choose to cease your participation in this research at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher, Victoria Morris, to inform her of your intention to withdraw from the study.

**TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY AT ANY TIME PLEASE CONTACT**

**THE RESEARCHER:** Victoria Morris, Phone: 1-306-229-2490, Email:

[victoriamorris@sasktel.net](mailto:victoriamorris@sasktel.net)

Upon your consent to voluntarily participate in this study, you will be asked by Victoria to participate in a semi-structured email or phone interview that may take up to 30 minutes.

#### **Informed Consent**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have been informed of the purpose of this research and agree to participate in this interview for the *Case Study of Youth Involvement in Irish Credit Unions* study.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*If you have any questions that have not been answered satisfactorily by the researcher named above, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at Cape Breton University, Maureen Finlayson, at (902) 563-1339 or email [Maureen\\_finlayson@cbu.ca](mailto:Maureen_finlayson@cbu.ca).*

## Appendix C

### Research Ethics Board Approval Letter



January 22, 2014

Victoria Morris  
MBA program  
Cape Breton University

Dear Victoria:

Re: Ethics protocol # 1314-78

The ethics submission entitled "*A Case Study of Youth Involvement in Irish Credit Unions*" has been approved by the Cape Breton University, Research Ethics Board (REB).

Ethics approvals are granted for a period of one (1) year. Principal researchers, of ongoing projects, are required to submit an annual report for review. Any change to the approved protocol must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation.

Good luck with your research.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles A. Taylor".

Charles A. (Sander) Taylor  
Research Officer

C. Michael McNamara

## **Appendix D**

### **Summary of Key Irish Credit Union Youth Initiatives**

There are a number of key initiatives to promote credit unions to young people in Ireland, many of which operate from the local to the regional or national level. Much of the following material was provided courtesy of and directly from the Irish League of Credit Unions. Interview respondents and Irish League of Credit Union staff also provided data. Initiatives explained in this Appendix include the Credit Union Schools Quiz, the CU Art Competition, GR8 Savers Week, the Student Loan Campaign, recognition for young staff, the National Youth Committee, the CU Youth Conference, and the role of Chapter Youth Officers.

**Credit Union Schools Quiz** - The annual Credit Union Schools Quiz is run by just over 300 credit unions. The competition is divided into two sections: Competition A for children up to 11 years and Competition B for children between 11 and 13 years. Over 25,000 school children take part in the Quiz each year. Local winners at the credit union level in each category go forward to Regional Finals. Winning entries from regional level go through to the National Final. The Quiz is one of the largest competitions of its type in Ireland.

**Credit Union Art Competition** - Now in its 29th year, the Art Competition continues to be one of the most successful annual events undertaken by the credit union movement. The competition this year attracts a huge 30,000 entries through 300 credit unions nationwide. Local winners at the credit union level in each category go forward to Regional Finals. Winning entries from regional level go through to the National Final. There are two categories in the Art Competition - General and Special. Each category

will have the following age groups: 7 years and under, 8-10 years, 11-13 years, 14-17 years, and 18 years and over. The Special Category encourages participants with a physical or intellectual disability to submit entries in free expression without the restriction of the competition's official theme (should they so wish).

**GR8 Savers Week** - Each May, credit unions run a GR8 Savers Week, an initiative to encourage children (predominantly primary school) to develop a savings habit with the local credit union. Each credit union receives a participation pack with posters, leaflets, activity sheets, sample press releases, etc. It serves to both raise the awareness of credit unions in local communities and can be used as a springboard to encourage young people (via their parents) to join credit unions. Since its inception in 2010, it has proven to be a very strong initiative with a growing uptake by credit unions. Many credit unions are now using the GR8 Savers "brand" to promote their offerings to young members. This can help to bring about a degree of standardization and can mean that national promotions are more effective at the local level.

**Student Loan Campaign** - Each year, the ILCU runs a national advertising and public relations campaign to promote credit union student loans. The campaign focuses on the value of credit union student loans and is leveraged locally by credit unions. CUs use the material provided (including press releases, posters, leaflets, web banners, etc., to promote student loans at the local level).

**Recognizing young staff members / volunteers** -The ILCU sponsors two young people to attend the World Council of Credit Unions' Young Credit Union People Programme (WYCUP), in order to identify and recognize young staff members and volunteers who have made, and who have the potential to make, a strong contribution to

the credit union movement. WYCUP forms part of the World Council Annual General Meeting. It is vital that young people are fully supported and assisted in fulfilling their potential within the movement. Credit unions and Chapters are encouraged to participate in this aim by identifying, acknowledging and nominating applicable young people.

All of the applications (aged under 35) attend a one-day meeting at which topical credit union issues are discussed and debated. Ultimately, two young people are selected to attend the WYCUP Programme. After the WYCUP Programme takes place, the two candidates are encouraged to share their experiences with other young people in the movement via a presentation at the CU Youth Conference, attending Chapter meetings, via social media, etc.

**National Youth Committee** - The main purpose of the National Youth Committee (NYC) is to assist, promote and support youth involvement within the credit union movement. This support should be both in terms of attracting young members to credit unions and in encouraging and enabling young people to volunteer in their local credit union. The Committee is comprised of seven members: the Chairman is drawn from the League Board, and the other six committee members are drawn from credit unions throughout the island. Committee members are selected via an application process. The NYC has been in operation since approximately 2004.

**Credit Union Youth Conference** – The CU Youth Conference attracts over 200 CU representatives. It is a two-day event, and 2014 marked its 8<sup>th</sup> year (ILCU, 2014). As ILCU Staff noted:

*The conference is an opportunity to share information and for credit unions to learn from one another. Credit unions are very cognizant of their role in*

*supporting young people in Ireland and this event allows us to share ideas on how to further engage with this segment of the population.*

*A key item for discussion on the agenda is the importance of credit unions growing and expanding their range of services, particularly electronic services, for young credit union members. The conference will also look at the role of the credit union in assisting families and students to meet the escalating costs of third level education. A number of other topics such as engaging, empowering and supporting young people and the role of the credit union in providing broad financial education to secondary and third level students in Ireland will also feature throughout the event. The conference participants will hear presentations from the National Youth Council of Ireland, the ILCU Youth Committee and social media experts, among others. (ILCU, 2014)*

**Chapter Youth Officers** - According to the Rules for Chapters of Irish CUs, the role of the [Chapter] Youth Officer includes developing a youth policy for the Chapter, organizing all youth activities, facilitating co-operation between other regional YOs, assisting in providing support and training to YOs and working with the ILCU, the National Youth Committee and other YOs as needed (ILCU, 2005, p. 8). YOs, where they exist, implement the national level youth-focused programming. As one Chapter YO stated:

*I work to promote youth involvement within all credit unions within my chapter region and I am currently planning a Youth Event which would be for all staff/ board members under the age of 35 to attend. (Chapter Youth Officer and NYC Member)*